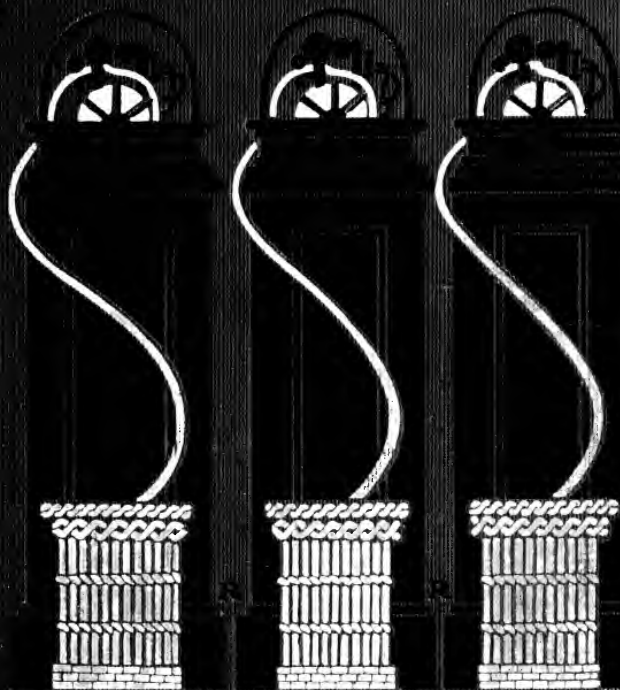


BLACK FRIDAY



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BLACK FRIDAY

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By

FREDERIC S. ISHAM

AUTHOR OF
UNDER THE ROSE
THE STROLLERS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
HARRISON FISHER

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CONTENTS

BOOK I

FLUCTUATIONS

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|---|------|
| I THE PRINCE AND THE CHARIOT | 1 |
| II A FLURRY IN HEARTS | 19 |
| III DEVELOPMENTS | 33 |
| IV A LITTLE SMILE; A BIG WEDDING | 45 |
| V WHY TIM WAS EXCITED | 58 |
| VI AT GAY SARATOGA | 67 |
| VII THE TELEGRAM AND ITS SEQUEL | 78 |
| VIII AN INTERRUPTED HONEYMOON | 91 |
| IX THE RETURN OF RICHARD STRONG | 100 |
| X A FLUTTER IN VALUES | 111 |
| XI CHARLIE ENDEAVORS TO NEGOTIATE AN IDEA | 123 |
| XII MR. ROSSITER VISITS THE STREET | 136 |
| XIII A DAY FOR REFLECTION | 148 |
| XIV ELINOR MAKES A RESOLUTION | 162 |
| XV ELINOR BREAKS A RESOLUTION | 170 |
| XVI MR. DALTON TAKES A SUDDEN RESOLUTION | 180 |
| XVII AN INTERRUPTED DANCE | 193 |

BOOK II

BLACK FRIDAY

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| I MR. STRONG RETURNS | 207 |
| II CHARLIE VISITS THE GOLD-ROOM | 216 |
| III RICHARD STRONG IS STARTLED | 225 |
| IV A FIGURE IN THE MOONLIGHT | 232 |

| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---------|--------------------------------------|------|
| V | ELINOR SITS UP LATE | 245 |
| VI | THE WRITER OF THE LETTER | 254 |
| VII | BEFORE THE BATTLE | 262 |
| VIII | BLACK FRIDAY | 278 |
| IX | NOON | 286 |
| X | THE END OF THE DAY | 294 |
| XI | THE MASTER OF THE SITUATION | 300 |
| XII | THE DAY OF SETTLEMENT | 308 |
| XIII | DALTON IS PUZZLED | 319 |
| XIV | THE SHADOW REPUDIATES HIS ALLEGIANCE | 327 |

BOOK III

READJUSTMENT

| | | |
|------|-----------------------------|-----|
| I | AN INTERRUPTED SONG | 337 |
| II | AN ENFORCED SOJOURN | 348 |
| III | THE GAMIN AND THE ROSE | 356 |
| IV | AN UNSUCCESSFUL SEARCH | 364 |
| V | A STRANGE ENCOUNTER | 373 |
| VI | THE BREAKING OF THE DAY | 379 |
| VII | A MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE | 385 |
| VIII | RICHARD STRONG LEAVES PARIS | 392 |
| IX | AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS | 397 |

BLACK FRIDAY

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

THE PRINCE AND THE CHARIOT

"Tra—la—la"

The white fingers moved uncertainly over the whiter keys, a hesitating accompaniment to a voice, once a tenor, now a breath.

"Ah, Roberto—"

A fit of coughing interrupted the singer; one hand yet continued to play irresolutely, as if waiting for the vocal melody, but *bravura* and *recitativo* were gone beyond recall; the fingers ceased their hopeless strumming, and rested, at a loss, on an unresolved chord.

Some one laughed.

"Oh, papa, you are too droll!"

A small hand held back the frayed, somber drapery of the doorway; a girlish figure stood framed by the dark

walnut. A morning toilet of mauve-colored fabric caught the sheen of sunlight; voluminous as one of the gowns of Lely, it swathed, yet clung not to, the slender form. Beneath a head-dress of chenille and bead network, brown curls gently swept the white brow.

The performer arose, a half-petulant look on his thin, refined face.

"And you, my child, are too forward!" he said.

"I couldn't help it, papa!"

Another laugh, and the frame lost its picture; the voluminous skirt rustled as the speaker entered the room.

"Besides, it was too absurd!" she added.

"Absurd!—"

"Not you, but the butcher!"

He stared at her. In the full light, the dominant characteristics of his face were pitilessly revealed; weakness and pride; artistic effeminacy, mixed with a certain hauteur; a man of dilettantism, perhaps, but the dilettantism of the old school that included pre-Raphaelite pictures, arias, cadenzas, and the Sapphic stanzas addressed to our foremothers' gloves, or ringlets.

"The butcher?" he repeated incredulously.

She nodded. "Yes; our neighbor; our bosom friend, the butcher! He called—at the front door!" And she held up a card. "Mr. Thomas Jenkins, Esquire! He asked for mama, and when the maid said mama was out,

he went out and slammed the front door. It's about the bill, I suppose, papa. Shall I put the card on the tray with mama's other callers? Fancy their consternation, sandwiched with Mr. Thomas Jenkins, dealer in tenderloins!"—flourishing the bit of pasteboard.

"Put the card in the fire, Elinor," he said absently. "We shall trade with Jenkins no more."

"He cut us off a fortnight ago," she laughed.

With this the speaker relapsed into silence and a chair, stifling a little yawn as she sank back into the capacious depths, and patting down reflectively her gown which outflowed with that prodigal waste of material characteristic of those days of silks, satins, poplins and passementeries. So she seemed buried, overwhelmed beneath the multitude of delicate flowers woven in the pattern of her dress. Her face looked out from lilacs; the tip of a foot, very small, peeped from beneath the flowery vestment, and impatiently tapped a faded carpet that had once been quite grand, but which was now only a mournful reminder of gorgeous roses and rococo wreaths; the more mournful, alas! because carpets, unlike pictures, do not improve with age and the partial obliteration of their pristine brightness.

"Bills! bills! bills!" A tap of the foot with each word.

The old gentleman just perceptibly shrugged his shoulders as if to say: "Well, my dear, what of it?"

"From Thomas Jenkins, Esquire; from Brown, Jones and Robinson; from Madam Upstart and Mademoiselle Parvenu—papa, is there anybody we *don't* owe?"

Another faint shrug of the shoulders; an angrier tap of the foot.

"Yesterday I bought a habit. 'Send that to Miss Elinor Rossiter,' I said to the clerk. What did he reply? 'Miss Rossiter! Oh, certainly! And won't you look at this coiffure? Won't you take this ruff?' No: that's the way he would have answered the other women. He didn't urge poor *me*, but hesitated; wrote the address in a melancholy manner, and bade me a thoughtful good day. And"—with flashing eyes—"the habit hasn't come yet! Papa, why don't you—fix things with the shopkeepers and other tradespeople?"

"Quite right, my dear; quite right!" spoke up a deep voice, and, with the words, the speaker, bearing the weight of her presence to lend emphasis to her approval, swept into the room.

A woman of decided emphasis herself; a chin that was emphasized by being double; a face that was emphasized by the height of her hair; a figure that was emphasized with avoirdupois; the whole, or sum total of her appearance being emphasized by a stupendous dress which stood

out like a bell; an expansive pardessus of black silk, an exaggerated underskirt, vastly trimmed and adorned; ridiculous, perhaps, yet "with circumference mighty, to repel all invasion," both formidable and disconcerting to the masculine mind!

"Quite right!" repeated Mrs. Rossiter, majestically.

Mr. Rossiter's shrug gave way to words; Miss Rossiter's queries might be dismissed with a gesture, but Mrs. Rossiter was not lightly to be set aside.

"Certainly, Madam; exactly!" murmured Mr. Rossiter, vaguely.

"There's Charles, the coachman," went on Mrs. Rossiter. "He had the impudence to come to *me* for his wages—and when I told him to apply to the proper authority, muttered something about 'much good it would do him.'"

"And look at Susan, mama!" spoke up Miss Rossiter. "When I asked her to be *quick* about dressing my hair for the madrigal concert, she said something about *slow* pay."

"I was thinking, my dear," said Mr. Rossiter, passing his white hand languidly through his white hair, "we might dispense with Charles' services and dispose of the horses."

"What!—sell my horses! Walk!"

"Why not?"—gently.

"Edwin, you're a fool."

This time Mr. Rossiter *did* shrug his shoulders, but whether in mild expostulation, incredulous dissent, or implied contradiction was not made clear. At that moment he was more concerned with the fact that the truth must come out, sooner or later. Sooner, by Mrs. Rossiter's present temper! The disagreeable, bare, bald truth!

Mr. Rossiter preferred to drift through life's troubled seas; with him, it was "better to hold back the truth than speak it ungraciously." Virtues that plagued you!—fie! Infirmities, without the thorn, were the more easily entertained! Unconsciously, in his policy of the art of living with the least trouble to himself, he modified the old proverb, and "Peace if possible, but truth at any rate" became with Mr. Rossiter "Truth if possible, but peace at any rate."

"You know, my dear," he at length said, "we have for some years been encroaching on my capital. Instead of confining ourselves to the income—we spent double. Proportionately as the principal and the income decreased, our expenses increased. It is a simple banking problem to compute how long on this diminishing scale the capital will last. In our case about twenty years have gone by and now the income has at length devoured

the principal! Both are gone. We have killed the goose that laid the golden egg."

It was a long speech for Mr. Rossiter; almost a maiden effort from the domestic rostrum. He was in the main a silent man; one of that great army of discreet persons who hold "a habit of secrecy is both politic and moral." Now that, perforce, he had discarded the habit, he waited calmly the eruption that would follow.

"We have spent your money," said Mrs. Rossiter, grimly. "It was not much."

"But somewhat more than your own fortune, Madam."

"I was a vain, silly, romantic girl, or I would not have married a *diminishing* income."

"It is highly flattering, my dear, that you married me," answered Mr. Rossiter, in a courtly manner.

"You! Fudge! All my friends warned me against the match."

"And in spite of their warnings, you had your way."

"Goodness knows where it's all gone to!" observed Mrs. Rossiter, irrelevantly. "I never bought a hat and paid what they asked. I never missed a bargain sale in my life, and no one ever bought more at them. No woman ever stinted and pinched as I have done! Hasn't the cook always had orders to save the cheese parings

and candle ends? Was anything ever wasted? But it is so like the man to blame the woman—”

“My dear, I am not blaming any one; I am only stating a fact.”

“That I must give up my carriage? Never! If you’ve spent your money—use mine.”

Mr. Rossiter flushed furiously. His throat felt very dry; his supineness was followed by a momentary excitation of feeling.

“I am very sorry, my dear, but—” he began.

“But what—but what? Why doesn’t the man speak?”

“Your money, Madam, as you know, was invested by me in bonds of the southern states.” Mr. Rossiter hesitated.

“Well? Well?”—impatiently.

“And these bonds”—speaking with difficulty—“have been recently repudiated.”

“Bonds!—repudiated! What does that mean?”

“It means, my dear, that a community which sold its paper and received money for it, now declares that paper invalid. In other words, the bonds, purchased in good faith by innocent investors, have been outlawed by the legislature of the very state which issued them.”

Mrs. Rossiter did not turn white,—that was impossible; but her face grew a shade less rosy; her eyes snapped; her figure appeared to expand indefinitely.

Mr. Rossiter grew proportionately smaller; he also became absently interested in what was going on outside—the pictures in the room—anything save Mrs. Rossiter. Miss Rossiter's lips parted ironically; she curled up more easily in the great chair like a spectator who settles herself for comfort as the curtain goes up.

Les Précieuses Ridicules or *École des Maris*! Miss Rossiter had not been long home from school, and the French comedies were still fresh in her mind. Her head lay daintily against the rosewood carving of the chair; her toe had vanished; the shadow of a smile now played about her mouth. The comedy; the irony; the tragedy of pounds, shillings and pence!

"You mean my money's gone!" spoke up Mrs. Rossiter, ominously.

"I mean it is invested in southern states bonds," said Mr. Rossiter, clearing his throat.

"Which—are—valueless!"

"The action of the legislature was entirely unexpected, Madam. Some of the best banks hold these bonds. When I invested your money in them, it was, as I told you, on the most conservative advice in the Street. The credit of the state has heretofore been held inviolable."

"Fiddlesticks! After frittering away your own fortune—you now rob me of mine!"

The slight figure of the man came to life; it seemed about to spring into resentful action; but the great figure grew greater, more overwhelming, more indignant, more crushing!

"Yes, rob! rob!"

He did not answer. A moment she waited.

"You're a fool; you always were; you always will be!" And Mrs. Rossiter swept from the room.

Mr. Rossiter stood by the window. He was paler than his wont; his hand trembled. The girl continued to watch; she seemed studying him impersonally, as one might almost observe a stranger. Was he handsome? Yes; after a fragile, womanly fashion. The strength of his family had gone into his ancestors; he remained the surviving shadow.

Without, a hand-organ began to play, and the strains of the latest popular piece of the concert saloons, the sad melody of *Polly Perkins*, floated far and near in that aristocratic neighborhood:

"I'm a broken-hearted milkman, in grief I'm arrayed,
Through keeping the company of a young serving-maid—"

The man at the crank thought Mr. Rossiter was looking at him and all the sunshine of Italy beamed from his countenance; he even sent a monkey toward the window, but at the aspect of that agile and hairy form, and the

gibbering face suddenly and unexpectedly thrust before him, Mr. Rossiter drew back with an abrupt exclamation. The girl in the chair began to laugh.

"Give him something, papa," she said. "Just to show we *can* give him, if we want to."

Mechanically Mr. Rossiter felt in his waistcoat and drew forth a piece of silver, which he regarded dubiously.

"Give it to him."

"But, my dear, this is twenty-five—"

"We can't be any poorer. And imagine how rich he'll think we are!"

"The monkey, or the man?" observed Mr. Rossiter, with a feeble attempt at levity.

"Both, you goose!"

Whereupon the father lifted the window and handed the coin to the chattering petitioner, who grasped it in his eager paw and vanished downward with mercenary and sordid glee. But the expression of the performer is beyond words to depict; doffing his cap, he bowed and bowed, and smiled and smiled; then grasping the handle of his instrument he played frantically, *presto, prestissimo*, the while he bobbed the monkey up and down with a string, as if the higher its leaps the more apparent his own overwhelming gratitude.

"There!" observed the girl. "In his mind—deluded

heathen!—we are richer than any one on the street. I'm sure Miss Vanderhoff, who is worth five millions, never gave him more than five cents. As we gave him five times that, we must be worth twenty-five millions at least. Think of it, papa! Are there twenty-five millions in the world?"

Mr. Rossiter started. "Twenty-five millions!" he repeated slowly. "They say Richard Strong has twice that."

"Mr. Strong," repeated the girl. "Such a—commonplace man and such a princely fortune!"

"My dear, it is the—commonplace men, as you call them, who are the princes nowadays."

"I suppose so. The modern Cinderella is carried off by Mr. Nobody who everybody thinks is Somebody. There is no such thing as fairy tales in this prosaic life any more."

Mr. Rossiter did not answer. "The handsome prince with his golden chariot!" went on the girl. "Where is he? The only man I know who really looks like a prince is Cousin Charlie, and I'm sure *he* hasn't any golden chariot. He's as poor as Cinderella herself." She thrust out her foot with a little ironical exclamation. "It isn't so very large, is it?"—and then tucked it back quickly; "but too large for Cinderella!"

"My child," said Mr. Rossiter, deliberately, although

hesitatingly, "Mr. Strong called on me not long ago. He—asked permission to pay you his addresses."

The rose-pink of her cheek deepened.

"You mean to—marry me?" she asked with feigned composure. Then she gave a little gasp and laughed.

"He makes up his mind very quickly, doesn't he, papa? I suppose that's because he is such a good business man. A man of quick decision! That's what the newspapers say of him. 'Mr. Strong buys the famous running-horse, Jolly Fellow. Took in his points at a glance!' Or, 'Mr. Strong buys a railroad. Just five minutes in deciding. He will rehabilitate it.' Perhaps he wants to rehabilitate me! What did you say when he asked you, papa?"

Mr. Rossiter regarded her helplessly.

"That—it was *your* affair, not *mine*!"

The girl arose quickly and threw her arms around his neck.

"You're a dear!" she said.

"A moment ago it was a goose," he answered, as she drew back, surveying him with a half-maternal, half-affectionate regard.

"Well, a dear goose, then!" Her look became very searching. "Why didn't you tell mama?"

He shifted uneasily. The question was obviously

both embarrassing and unexpected. "How do you know I did not?"

"Because she hasn't said anything about it. Because she hasn't—" Abruptly she broke off. "The truth!"—placing her hands on his shoulders. "Why—didn't—you—tell—mama?"

"Well, the fact of the matter is," he began, "I was afraid—"

"That mama might jump at the chance!"

His manner became apologetic.

"Well, you know your mother is—we might say—a practical sort of woman, and—I was afraid she—"

The girl laughed loudly; the explanation died away.

"Poor mama!" said Elinor. "What she has missed! This is delicious! And what did—he say?"

"He—who?"

"The fairy prince!"

Mr. Rossiter was becoming more bewildered. His daughter's mood was like the whirlwind; it blew him hither and thither.

"Mr. Strong said—ahem—"

"His exact words, papa!" The hands tightened on his shoulders; the brown eyes probed him.

"He didn't really say anything, my dear. Perhaps he looked a little taken aback—"

The hands fell from the old man's shoulders.

"Of course," she said, "he is used to getting control of whatever he wants. Anything that is wrecked! Then he restores the circulation!—isn't that what you call it? Did you speak to him about mama's bonds, papa?"

Mr. Rossiter sighed. He had wished to forget the scene his daughter had witnessed.

"I believe I did mention the matter to him some time ago. I asked him if he regarded the bonds as a hopeless investment and he replied he so regarded them; that he had never had any confidence in them!"

"Then he knows that we are anemic; like some of the railroads he picks up?"

"Really, my dear, I will say that Mr. Strong is a man of unimpeachable rectitude. That he has a genuine regard for you, I have no doubt. 'Mr. Rossiter,' he said, 'I have met your daughter and—'"

The girl placed her hand playfully over her father's lips.

"Hush, papa!" she said. "He met me but twice. Once at Mrs. Fanning's and once at Miss Van Dolsen's. On both occasions he spoke to me; I answered; we parted! Quite romantic, dear, don't you think so?"

"I had made up my mind not to mention the matter, Elinor," he said, not without compunction.

"Then why did you?"—quickly.

"It seemed to come out naturally—"

"In connection with the fifty millions!"

An expression of real distress mantled his oversensitive face.

"Elinor—"

"There!—I'm not blaming you. After all, it was the monkey's fault!" she said, smiling. "I believe that monkey will haunt me," she went on, after a pause. "How he wanted the money; the money! How he begged for it; implored it! And how he jumped when he got it! What a frightfully terrible and human thing he looked like—peering through the window! As if he would have done anything to get it!"

Mr. Rossiter again shifted uneasily; philosophizing was not in his line. Besides, the morning had been a trying one and he felt the need of fresh air.

"Well, my dear, I think I had better be off to the club. Remember, don't tell your mother. I am sorry to have distressed you. And as for Mr. Strong, I don't think we shall be troubled by him. He said he would do himself the honor to call; he has not done so, however—"

"But he has walked by the house every morning for the last week!"

Mr. Rossiter looked startled for a moment. "It is on his way to the office," he then said. "Good-by, my dear."

He bent over and would have touched her brown hair with his lips, but she lifted her face.

"Tut! what's this?" he asked playfully.

"Would you refuse a lady's lips, sir?" she laughed.

As he kissed her, a light in her eyes, half-wistful, rested on him for a moment. When he turned she looked after him, almost pityingly.

"Oh the man that has me must have silver and gold,
Must have a chariot to ride in, must be handsome and bold;
His hair must be curly as any watch-spring,
And his whiskers as big as—a—brush—for—clothing!"

The hand-organ man was moving away and the ambitious lay of *Polly Perkins* died in the distance.

Miss Rossiter went to the window. The street was now fairly awake; the precipitate delivery wagons mingled with the luxurious landau, brougham and victoria. Across the way a maid scrubbed the front steps of the Garnett mansion with a diligence as hearty as that of the inmates' Dutch ancestors, who chased out dirt and the devil with the mop and the broom. As Elinor was about to turn away, a figure approached that arrested her attention; a flush overspread her face; she started again to draw back, but did not. Some power seemed to hold her there against her will.

What business had he to walk by every morning? Then she noticed Miss Garnett, a hopeless spinster, peer-

ing from one of the broad windows opposite. "Hateful thing!" thought the girl. The figure drew nearer; he was looking down; he even seemed to walk more slowly. With growing antagonism the girl watched him. "How strong he looks!" she thought. And then triumphantly: "He is not so confident as he seems. I am sure he is hesitating. He wants to call and—he doesn't dare! He is afraid!—afraid—" she repeated— "of me!"

Her lip curled; in her eyes was an indefinable light.

"How I hate him!" she said, and at that moment he looked up.

He started perceptibly when he saw her; the glance they exchanged seemed of indefinite duration. He bowed formally, and then she suddenly smiled. He stopped outright; she was gone. Thoughtfully he walked on, but his countenance appeared transfigured.

CHAPTER II

A FLURRY IN HEARTS

A woman, saith the moralist, has two smiles an angel might envy—the smile that accepts a lover before words are uttered, and the smile that lights on the first-born babe. Miss Rossiter's smile might or might not belong to the former category, but whether, in any event, the heavenly host beheld it with a jaundiced eye remains a hypothetical proposition. Mr. Richard Strong, being of the earth, saw in it something supernal, without pausing to analyze whether it conveyed a promise or covert encouragement. He had dealt in some valuable commodities, but a woman's smile—her smile!—was an unknown quantity, and he knew not by what standard to gage it.

As he turned from the house, continuing his walk, his thoughts traveled retrospectively, accumulating, classifying after his wont, all the scanty data of their brief acquaintance. A "How-do-you-do?" at Mrs. Fanning's; a clear, musical voice rising above the bibble-babble; brown eyes, that looked at him as he liked to look at peo-

ple—straight, deep; the impression of an erect, proud figure, though light and youthful!

“Who are the Rossiters?” he had said to the hostess, when the young girl had turned.

“The Rossiters,” that lady had replied, “have a list of ancestors as far back as the Dutch pirates who scuttled the Spanish treasure ships.”

At Miss Van Dolsen’s there had been a few more words, conventional, yet well-remembered:

“I believe I met you once before, Mr. Strong—at Mrs. Fanning’s, I think?”

“At Mrs. Fanning’s, I am sure, Miss Rossiter.”

“How delightful—to be always positive! You have the reputation of being a positive man. Perhaps you are one of those who believe men are always sure, while women only think, or guess.”

“Perhaps our first meeting impressed me more than it did you.”

“Perhaps,”—indifferently.

That had been about all; a little more, but nothing of moment. Slender data for Mr. Richard Strong to ponder over; he who was insatiable for details! Later Mr. Rossiter had said: “It is my daughter’s affair; not mine.”

Mr. Strong knew how to deal with men, but not with women. For the first time in many years he had been at

a loss what to do. He might compel the market; he might compel competition to step aside; he might compel trunk lines to sell out; but he could not compel a woman's inclination. It was too intangible, subtle and delicate a commodity for his strong grasp; he might reach for it for ever yet never touch it; his hand would close on air. This had been the burden of his thoughts as he walked by her house once a day.

But suddenly a new factor had altered the tenor of the situation. The proposition that had of late seemed dubious—so dubious he had almost abandoned all hope of it—now seemed as golden as the dream of Alnaschar. From Miss Rossiter at Mrs. Fanning's—cold, proud!—to Miss Rossiter in the window, became a space abruptly spanned by a rainbow.

He came to himself with a start, finding that he stood at the head of *the* street; the Lombard Street of the rocky isle that bears on its crest the affluent city. Clang, clang, tolled the bells of Trinity. For the moment, the first time almost in his career, his office was distasteful to him, and he who always turned to the left into the thoroughfare that is the golden artery of the heart of the western world, now wheeled to the right, where beneath the shadow of the spire slept those who cared not for the heavy or the light purse, or the loaves and the fishes.

Here, in God's-acre, the bobolink and the robin were

singing merrily. Bird-songs and the fragrance of flowers—what had they for Richard Strong? Now, if it had been the gentle Halleck; he who mixed stocks with poetry, and poetry with stocks! But Richard Strong! Yet he sat there; aye, sat and listened! And dreamed, perhaps; dreamed of kinsmen and kinswomen gone; of life and death; the battle of the strong; the light of love, a sun shining on the field of strife! One hour he remained in the churchyard; no more, no less, for he arose when from the “undaunted steeple” came the tolling anew.

Clang! clang! “Work! work!” said the brazen bells.

“Counting the dead men, Richard?” said a voice at his elbow, as he was leaving the burial-ground.

For an instant, he felt disconcerted; guiltily culpable. “There is no need of looking for them here in the cemetery, Commodore,” he replied, confronting his questioner. “Since you twisted the tail of the legislature, they’re all in Albany.”

At this reference to the famous Harlem corner, the other’s eyes sparkled; the ends of his white choker seemed to stand out more aggressively beyond the aggressive whiskers that adorned the sides of his aggressive, round, bluff face.

“We did disturb them a leetle, Richard,” said the

commodore. "They broke their word and needed a leetle dressing down."

But later Mr. Vanderbilt said to his old friend, John Tobin, the one-time gate-keeper at Staten Island: "John, I saw Richard Strong in the graveyard. What do you suppose he was there thinking about?"

"Dunno," answered Tobin. "Got a right to be there, I guess."

"He didn't look, John, as if he was trying to get a corner on tombstones. Something's up!"

"Then we're likely to hear of it," answered Tobin, philosophically.

Along the street where Captain Kidd and Benedict Arnold once had lived, where George Washington had taken the oath of office and the Stamp Act Congress had assembled, Richard Strong walked with quick, firm step, threading a procession of people which at this hour thronged the sidewalk. Clerks, alert, and clerks, heavy-eyed—from the concert-saloons the night before—mingled with the broker, brisk as a bee, and the old speculator, hobbling on his cane. The professional distributors of "tips," the waifs and estrays from the bubbling pot of finance, rubbed elbows with Plutus and Midas; wealth walked before, or behind, poverty; and see! amid all, strode Wisdom and Learning, the benign, the complaisant Greeley! Scamps and runagates; saints and sin-

ners ; good men and bad men—all merging in a common channel, like a shoal of minnows scurrying toward a feeding-ground !

But a short distance and Richard Strong reached an unpretentious building, his place of business. Here modest offices, nearly opposite the Treasury's marble front, looked down on the busiest spot of all that busy neighborhood "where Jews and Gentiles most were wont to throng for trade and latest speculation." Entering his own private office, Richard Strong plunged at once into his work. Upon a table a mass of documents and maps were arranged with some semblance of order, and over these he bent, glancing rapidly through the former and keenly at the latter, finally leaning back with decision in his chair and touching a bell.

A tall, thin man, with a hooked nose, Roman but not Hebraic, straggling white hair and the unruffled smile of a child, responded, standing hesitatingly on the threshold and entering not without deference.

"Good morning, Tim Taplin. Sit down, sir," commanded Richard Strong. "There is a good deal to be done and we'd better get at it."

"Yes, sir ; certainly, sir !" said Tim.

"Have you the papers of the D. B. and C. line? Ah, here they are ! Make a note that between A and B, on Diagram 4, the road will have to be reballasted. Also,

at certain points indicated, steel bridges must replace the wooden ones; the line to be extended to—”

And so on indefinitely, spinning a web with those fine tracings on the map; the sustaining strands, the main lines; the branches, mere feeders strengthening the meshes! A filament requiring much patience to put together, that it might not ultimately glitter with dew-drops instead of dividends! The life of a weaver may be short, as the Holy Book says, but it is, also, absorbing, and, engaged in this subtle and delicate task—to which in the beginning that day he had, perhaps, forced himself—Richard Strong noted not how the hours slipped by.

Tim wrote and listened; departed on errands and came back again; yawned and looked at the picture on the wall of that big man, Jacob Little, who had made and lost nine fortunes; yawned again and thought of Hackett as Falstaff, and whether he and his sister would go to Niblo's Garden, or—for the lark of it!—take in the mermaid, the stuffed elephant, the fat woman and the Albinos at Barnum's, and—

“Tim Taplin, you're wool-gathering!”

Richard Strong was regarding him quizzically but not unkindly. Tim recovered himself with an effort. The shadows were falling without; his employer was a hard taskmaster.

"Yes, sir; I'm afraid I was, sir," answered the clerk.

"That will do. You may go."

He spoke less brusquely than usual, and, when Tim had departed, fell into a reverie himself. The strident tones of a newsboy without, crying some new iniquity of the Tweed Ring and the immoral, if not immortal, "What-are-you-going-to-do-about-it?" Boss, aroused him.

"Richard Strong, *you're* wool-gathering!" he said half-aloud, and arose.

At eight o'clock, he stood resolutely, if not altogether confidently, at the door of the Rossiter mansion. He wondered if Miss Rossiter had gone out; he half-wished that she had; his card would the better pave the way for the future than—

No; the ladies were at home, said the waspish-looking maid (salary-in-arrears written on her face!). Would he wait in the reception-room? The visitor complied. Mechanically he turned over the day's events in his mind and strove to approach the business in hand with a lucid understanding of what was required of him. But somehow his usual clearness of perception failed him; he was conscious of waiting and expecting some one, but not planning what he should say when he saw her.

A rustling gown; a large, not a slender, figure crossed the threshold, and Mrs. Rossiter, with bare arms and bare

shoulders, her hair a little higher, her gown a little lower, approached with outstretched hand and obvious cordiality.

“Mr. Strong, how delightful! I have not seen you since—since we met at Miss Van Dolsen’s. My daughter will be down presently. We were speaking of you only the other day”—a conventional fib—“and Mr. Rossiter was telling me that—”

“I asked him for Miss Rossiter’s hand,” blurted out Richard Strong.

Mrs. Rossiter’s face would have made the fortune of a painter, could he have succeeded in depicting on canvas the amazement, incredulity, joy, chagrin, struggling for mastery on her features.

“Asked for her hand!” she repeated. “For Elinor’s—” she almost gasped.

“I should have waited—I know—”

“When did you speak to Mr. Rossiter?” Mrs. Rossiter strove to regain her composure; her snapping eyes boded no good for her better half.

“Some time ago.”

The lady’s lips were firmly compressed. She endeavored to smile and partly succeeded. Not entirely a natural smile, but rather of the frozen variety, as if behind

it lay a tragic mask; a transformation waiting for Mr. Rossiter!

“And what—did he say?”

“That it was Miss Rossiter’s affair, Madam.”

His hearer’s bosom rose and fell violently; her fan fluttered; she dared not trust herself to speak—just yet. Mr. Strong, with his millions—rejected!—at least, coldly received!—and the wolf at the door, and the creditors, too—herself put to the utmost shift—out of pocket, if not out at elbows! Richard Strong, for whom many a net had been cast by ambitious matrons, yet who had heretofore escaped through the meshes, between the buoys or beneath the sinkers! But finally with an effort Mrs. Rossiter controlled the raging tempest of her mind; the heaving ceased, or became more calm and tranquil.

“Of course, Mr. Strong,” she said, “Mr. Rossiter ‘was right.”

What language could tell how much the sentence cost her!

“We could not think—” she went on. “A young girl should be free to bestow her hand with her heart. Though, to be sure, young people are young people and a little guidance—” Her voice faded into vagueness. “A mother’s solicitude is naturally very great, Mr. Strong,” she ended helplessly.

The listener remained silent. Mrs. Rossiter gradually recovered her equanimity.

"Won't you be seated, Mr. Strong?" she said solicitously.

"Thank you, Madam," he answered, and followed her example.

"We are, Mr. Strong, one might say—"

"Comparative strangers?"

"Hardly that; no, I would not say that. Of course, one hears all about people and almost feels as if one knows them. You probably know us. The Rossiters are a well-known—if you will pardon the expression—a well-known family. General Rossiter, as you are undoubtedly aware, was on Washington's staff. On *my* side, there is my great-great-grandfather, one of the patroons who, when he came to New York in his coach and six and liveried servants, created such a sensation that the people lined the very walk to see him pass!"

"There, Madam, you have the advantage of me," said Richard Strong, bluntly. "I don't know where my ancestors were during the Revolution, but I am sure none of them ever rode in a coach and six down Broadway."

"Ah, well," answered Mrs. Rossiter, graciously, "some of us have ancestors; and some of us have—" "money" she was about to say, but didn't—"and some of us

haven't! Not that it matters—or it shouldn't—in this free and democratic country, or republic, should it?"

Although Mrs. Rossiter's style in conversation was apt to become somewhat involved, her meaning was generally plain.

"My father, Madam, was a western cattle drover," continued Mr. Strong. A flutter of Mrs. Rossiter's fan. "My mother kept a boarding-house in a mining town." More violent agitation! "From her"—with a laugh—"I must have inherited what little executive ability I possess. It was said—and one or two of her boarders are to-day prominent figures from the western world in Wall Street—she could carve a poor bird with such nice discretion for a company of twenty that every man always got up satisfied. Sometimes, to me"—clasping his hands over his knee—"a lean railroad suggests the boarding-house turkey—it takes a deal of skilful carving to satisfy the ravenous appetites of the stock-holders!"

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Rossiter, feebly. "Of course," she added, with a faint sigh, "a boarding-house out West is not exactly the same thing as a boarding-house in New York City."

"Worse, Madam!"

Mrs. Rossiter straightened rather haughtily, but immediately relaxed.



"Out there, the boarders wear revolvers in the dining-room, and carry their bowie-knives into the parlor!"

The hostess laughed; she felt in duty bound to do so; but it was not a hearty laugh; it rang artificially. Richard Strong regarded her keenly, when suddenly his thoughts shifted from boarding-houses and decrepit railroads and Mrs. Rossiter's ancestors to a tall and graceful form that seemed to appear by magic, and now stood before him, clad in white, her head very proudly raised, but her face paler than it had impressed him at Mrs. Fanning's. If Richard Strong was not Miss Rossiter's prince of the fairy tale, she certainly seemed to his eyes more beautiful than all the gracious beings of childhood's lore, and, when she gave him her hand, he bent over it silently, having no words; like a courtier, voiceless before his queen. A great joy leaped in his heart; he looked into her eyes; to him they were full of wonderful lights. The vanities of the world fell magically from his shoulders; they two seemed alone; dwellers of a new earth; a garden, variously called Eden, the Elysian Fields, the Bowers of Bliss!

Perhaps Mrs. Rossiter felt that she was intruding in that Hesperidian atmosphere, for, murmuring something about "dear Edwin," she managed to effect a not too pointed exit, effacing herself from the presence of Richard Strong in a most quiet and unobtrusive manner

for a person of such weight and importance. Not that she did not listen—after a memorable interview with Mr. Rossiter which that gentleman never forgot—at the head of the balustrade, but was little rewarded for her pains. Mr. Strong was not so self-assertive as he had been earlier in the evening; at least, he seemed to have less to say, and that in a tone that did not carry to the spot where Mrs. Rossiter, red from bending over, was peering downward.

“Well, my dear, what did you find to talk about?” said Mrs. Rossiter, when it was all over, and Mr. Strong’s footsteps could be heard echoing down the front steps.

“Not very much, mama!” was the light reply.

“And did he not even say—when he would call again?” asked the elder lady, in what might almost be designated a playful tone.

“He has asked us to go to *La Juive* Monday night.”

“*La Juive!* my dear! One of my favorite operas! Such soulful music! And Mr. Strong’s box is one of the most prominent in the theater—although they say he’s seldom there, himself. Good night, my dear; good night! How beautiful you are looking to-night!” And Mrs. Rossiter’s pent-up affection expended itself in a parting caress.

CHAPTER III

DEVELOPMENTS

The world stared to see Miss Rossiter and Mr. Strong together at the opera; it also had a pretext to stare on sundry other occasions—at the Ole Bull concerts, the Robertson plays, the artists' exhibition. Of course, every one knew Mr. Strong, but heretofore, society had seen little of him; not that he appeared to care for it now—save for one member of it. The latter fact was patent to all, and furnished the basis for much talk over tea-cups. Mrs. Rossiter was given due credit; truly she had the managerial eye,—and her daughter scarcely “out”!

If Elinor realized what people were saying and how she was the central figure of neighborly tittle-tattle, her manner did not betray such consciousness. With Mr. Strong she carried herself much as with other people, only perhaps in his case her girlish imperiousness was slightly emphasized. The self-consciousness she had felt on the occasion of his first visit had quickly vanished. He had not appeared the aggressive, dominating charac-

ter her preconceived notion had pictured him, and his obvious constraint put her entirely at her ease. It may be the very knowledge of her power over him brought with it an unconscious satisfaction which called for the exercise rather than the disuse of those weapons belonging to her sex. Here was some one whom the world counted a leader, a man of iron, yet he was to be swayed by a word, a gesture. In her presence he was sometimes embarrassed, almost awkward, and then she would study him with the superior smile of girlhood. She did not realize the difference in their ages—that the balance of years lay to his credit—for on the occasions when they were alone his reserved diffidence made him almost boyish.

She even, perhaps, found pleasure in testing her influence, and at least once, with the result that her confidence in herself was slightly shaken. He had asked them all to occupy his box for a certain opera, whereupon Elinor suggested another night when a different and, to her, more pleasing work was to be given.

“I am sorry,” he said, “but on that evening I can not join you. I have a business engagement.”

The girl looked somewhat surprised; it was the first time he had not been swayed to her will.

“And would you rather talk business than listen to music?” she said.

"I have to," he answered simply. "At least, on this occasion."

She lifted her brows.

"How disagreeable!" she said. "To *have* to do things!"

Her manner that night puzzled him, for he was not cognizant he had given her cause for offense. When he called a few evenings later, she kept him waiting no inconsiderable period, and when she did come down, her eyes expressed just a trace of malice.

"Thank you for the flowers," she said, giving him the tips of her fingers.

"Did you like them?" he asked dubiously, noting at the same time that she wore none of them.

"Oh, yes," she answered pointedly; "I was overwhelmed by them."

Mr. Strong flushed. "Send up all the red roses you have in that case," he had said to the florist. At her words and accent, he wondered for the first time if the mere lavishness of his gift had not savored of ostentation. He was a most unostentatious man in his own tastes and requirements, and he vaguely regretted that he had not looked to see how many flowers there really had been in the case. At the same time he argued from cause to effect—the fact she had not a single

flower in her dress augured she was not pleased, but he did not blame her; he himself was the delinquent.

The next time, however, he sent her only a single rose, the selection of which caused him considerable trouble and solicitude. In fact, he was so long in casting about for what he wanted, that when he reached his office he surprised himself by being ten minutes late at a directors' meeting. The six grave faces that confronted his from the long table seemed like a reproof, and, as Richard Strong called the meeting to order, he despatched matters with a vigor that atoned for that half-hour's dalliance in the primrose path.

That night he felt even less confident than usual when he went to the Rossiter house. Women, he told himself, were like flowers; he knew as little of the one as of the other. But when he entered the room and she came in with his rose on her dress, the scales seemed to fall from his eyes. His face changed: she did care for him—a little—perhaps——

His cause for self-congratulation, however, was as ephemeral as it was sudden. She was more capricious than ever, leading the conversation to the most frivolous depths, until a gradual change settled on his spirits and a conventional distance once more separated them. Then she was satisfied, for she could not quite forget the expression with which he had first regarded her.

During all this time he had not spoken to her of that other vital matter, though once or twice he had apparently started to approach it, but with a quick divination she had somehow managed to elude the subject. Soon, however, she was to learn that her position was not so impregnable as at first it had seemed. One night he was unduly thoughtful, she lighter, more animated; but her gaiety failed of its usual effect. When he did speak he said:

"Miss Rossiter, I don't know whether your father ever spoke to you about a conversation I once had with him."

Elinor's color swiftly changed; she endeavored to interject some remark not germane to the subject, but this time he persevered, stubbornly, firmly, and instinctively she felt she could not stop him. His eyes were dark, deep, glowing; they dismayed her, yet she could hardly look away from them. Quickly she arose. His face grew paler.

"I told him that I wanted you to be—my wife."

The girl's hand trembled; she stood half-turned from him. He too, arose, his features strong, powerful.

"There isn't much to say," he went on. "When one has said that, it seems to be all."

For the moment the resources of the past seemed to desert her.

"Won't you look at me?" he said.

She raised her eyes, almost defiantly; her face was sober enough now.

“Could you—care for me enough for that?”

She strove to tell him what was in her mind; that she could not, never could marry him, but at that moment a strange thing happened to her. She asked herself if it was really true she didn't care for him at all. For an instant he waited; a wave of force seemed drawing her against her will. Steadfastly she resisted it. Of course, she did not care.

“Good night,” he said.

She gave him her hand almost mechanically. Her eyes could not meet his now.

“Good night,” he repeated, holding her hand. He dropped it. For a moment there was silence. “May I call again?”

Did she speak? Did she bow her head in assent? She knew that if he went with no sign from her, she would never see him again. She remembered afterward the look of joy in his eyes as he left. What did it mean? She pressed her hands to her head. “He made me,” she thought, and her cheeks burned. Then into her eyes came a flash.

“He may call,” she said, “but he will find me firm—firm!”

In thus determining upon her future course and seeking to intrench herself in a stronger citadel than before, Elinor learned, however, that it is easier to give an advantage than to regain it. The next bit of gossip the World heard—and the World had been expecting it, and, therefore, evinced no surprise—was the announcement of the engagement of Miss Rossiter, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Rossiter, to Mr. Richard Strong.

“Made the most of her opportunity!” said Society.

“I am very glad, my dear, for your sake,” had been Mrs. Rossiter’s comment.

Mr. Rossiter only kissed her.

At this period Elinor, be it confessed, occasionally looked a little troubled, yet not unhappy, as a person might appear who was asking herself questions—sometimes finding the answers to her liking; again, of a character to cause inward study. But every girl, no doubt, thus communes with herself during this, *the* momentous epoch, and she discovered no reason, perhaps, to think she was undergoing experiences unusual or so much out of the ordinary.

“The serious duties of life!—The responsibilities you assume, young ladies, when you enter upon the broader field of woman’s destiny——” The echoes of that last address at boarding-school seemed fitted to her case;

she could smile at it now, as then, but those tremendous, inevitable obligations, whatever they were, had come to nest, or rest, on her untried young shoulders. She could endeavor to shake them off, but they only came back to her. So she sighed, laughed, and let them be. Certainly Mr. Strong appeared the impersonation of what the essayist would have called "her destiny."

She still treated him as at first—although forewarned that her power was at times subject to his will—and he bent his head to that pleasant yoke, finding her caprices as charming as bewildering. But very shortly after the public proclamation, Mr. Strong suddenly announced to her his intention of going away to England, on an imperative matter, to be gone two months, possibly longer.

"Two months!" she said, studying him with clear eyes. Could he leave her so long—now?

"Yes," he answered, and added in his direct fashion: "It is necessary." As if that disposed of every phase of the situation!

"When do you go?"

"To-morrow."

She opened her eyes wider; for a moment there was silence.

"Why are you going?" she then asked in a serious tone.

"The success, of a railway system I am inaugurating depends upon the conversion of certain bonds and the coöperation of the English holders of various interests."

"I'm sure I don't understand," she observed, holding herself more erect.

"You see," he went on, "conservative England has taken a great interest in my plans. And it is to England we turn for much of the backbone of our railroad enterprises."

"Oh!" she said, looking at him from a cold distance. And then in a more lively tone: "How nice it must be to have so much business! I suppose you think of it all the time! Of course you must go. I wonder if you will succeed in—what was it?—converting certain bonds? That means making some more money, doesn't it? But you always succeed, don't you?"

"Not always," he said, smiling. "But then, you know, success is often built on failure."

"Most of the people I like best in the world, in the category of your Street, would be considered failures," she observed lightly.

He looked at her, but did not answer.

"Some of them are so delightfully irresponsible!" she continued.

"Yes?" he assented, rather puzzled.

Capriciously she stood before where he was seated.

"Indeed, they awaken a fellow-feeling!"

"Why?" he asked, thinking more of her than of her words.

"Didn't you know that *I*—am irresponsible?"

He looked at the mocking lips, the kindling eyes, the graceful, proud figure.

"I know—you are beautiful!" he said, leaning forward, with his heart in his eyes.

It was the first outburst of flattery she had ever heard from him; it sent the hot blood to her cheeks; drowned the half-defiance in her eyes. At the same time, coupled with what had gone before, it angered her, and this feeling became paramount. But almost immediately he looked down; his face became grave; his brows concealed something wistful in his gaze.

"I'll try to expedite the matter as much as possible," he said.

Her lips pressed firmly together, and the conversation lagged on other matters.

When he arose to go he looked at her longingly a moment; then taking both her hands in a close grasp, he strove to speak to her of what was most on his mind.

"Of course it is too bad, but of course, too, you must go," she had answered with shining eyes and a frosty

little smile. He did not seek to analyze the reason, but never before had he found it so difficult to express himself; and, at a loss, he drew her into his arms. Afterward, as he turned from the house, he had but the remembrance of a parting that seemed inadequate and disappointing.

When he had gone Elinor stood for a moment in an inflexible attitude; then stole to the window in the darkened sitting-room and looked out. Retracing her steps to the hall, a snatch of a song came from her lips, but the musical impulse soon expended itself and silently she began to rearrange the waltzes, opera scores and ballads with which the top of the piano was littered. As she went up the stairs, a sudden blankness or sense of loss seemed to deaden her spirits.

Thereafter, however, any feeling she may have entertained toward him—or business—did not interfere with her pleasures. Possibly, even, she exerted herself to unusual gaieties. The season, with Parepa Rosa operas, the concerts at Steinway Hall, assemblies in the *salon bleu* of the famous caterers', and dances at the Four-in-Hand club-house, did not lack festivities, and in a whirl of multitudinous diversions, she obeyed the Chesterfieldian adage and snatched the passing flowers of joy with the best grace imaginable.

It may be she sometimes thought of ending a situa-

tion fraught with perplexities, but the World had heard and accepted the announcement, and she shrank from the publicity that would follow the severing of the tie. Also, she had passed her word, and to a girl of her pride, that meant a great deal. Other reasons which she might not fully acknowledge, yet which existed, were in all likelihood delicate threads further shaping the fabric of her fate. Certainly she did not appear to regret his absence, but accepted other attention freely. Society even went so far as to comment thereon, but Mr. Rositer, who knew Elinor well, saw nothing anomalous in her bearing.

"Did you—convert the bonds?" were almost her first words to Mr. Strong upon that gentleman's return.

"Yes; everything's all right," he answered. "I'm sorry I was delayed a little longer than I thought I should be. I—hope you didn't mind?"

"I?" she laughed, but her voice sounded rather hard. "I've had a perfectly lovely winter!"

CHAPTER IV

A LITTLE SMILE; A BIG WEDDING

Happy the bride the sun shines on! Miss Rossiter's felicity, measured by the standard of the familiar saw, should have been unequivocal, for on that day of days the sunlight lay in shimmering luster on the city.

The marriage was to be celebrated in Mrs. Rossiter's church, a fashionable place of meeting, or exclusive ecclesiastical club, where the Word and the World lay down together like the lion and the lamb in the millenium; where soft lights and short sermons tranquilized the congregation and assuaging oil was poured on the troubled conscience. Once it is indeed chronicled the rector had awakened and roared as gently as any sucking dove, but the sermon occasioned so much disapproval that he immediately relaxed to moderation, and the poppy and mandragora again prevailed in the sacred place.

Richard Strong was not, in the strict sense of the word, a church-goer, but he had been prone often to re-

pair to the great white chapel on Brooklyn Heights, to listen to Mr. Beecher, and to become a part of that vast, democratic congregation wont to feed, not on discourses mild as mother's milk, but on a more invigorating, strength-giving, moral diet.

Thus it came about that because of his friendship and admiration for Mr. Beecher and in his ignorance of hymeneal etiquette, Mr. Strong had the temerity to suggest that it would be a fine thing to have the ceremony performed by that minister. Mrs. Rossiter's face was a study. Her daughter married in that common auditorium, where the people surged and struggled and even climbed on to the window-sills; where the children sat on the very steps of the pulpit while the minister was preaching! Mr. Beecher was a great man, no doubt—his salary was evidence of that, but the Rossiters had never taken kindly to revivals or evangelists—"theology *bouffe*," or "religion *bouffe*"—they accepted the apostles, of course, but they had lived so long ago the Rossiters had never been brought into personal contact with them!

"Of course," she said, "the ceremony *could* only take place in the bride's church."

Mr. Strong laughed and quickly abandoned the point. Temple, tabernacle, or ecclesiastical club, it was really all one to him, the result would be the same, and he

was a man who sought results without quarreling needlessly with ways and means.

For many years the Rossiter mansion had not assumed so festal an aspect as on that particular wedding-day, and all the street was up in arms—or rather, up in eyes—to do honor to the occasion. Windows commanding a view of the house—especially the windows of those residences belonging to people that had not been invited to the marriage—were at a premium among the respective feminine members of the various families. In fact, during all the past week, these windows had had eyes, watching the tradespeople coming and going.

“Parcels! parcels! parcels!” had murmured Mrs. Parker, who was not of Mrs. Rossiter’s circle. “And only a few months ago, no one would trust them!”

And truly the Rossiter credit had soared of late; Brown, Jones and Robinson had not only been very glad to send up what Mrs. Rossiter selected, but had urged that good lady to the temptation of further extravagances. Even Thomas Jenkins, Esquire, had called—this time at the back door—and humbly solicited the continuance of that patronage that had suddenly become so desirable.

In the reception-room of the old homestead the shabby-genteel aspect of furniture, draperies and carpet was overshadowed and lost sight of in the profusion of deco-

rations and floral adornments. Here were gathered the heroine of the occasion and her bridesmaids. Did Miss Rossiter realize the importance of the step she was taking? With more than usual vivacity she was chatting with her fair bevy of assistants, the whiteness of her attire emphasizing a heightened color which gave to her cheeks the tint of wild roses.

The mother of the bride, adorned in the splendor of green silk, trimmed with point appliqué—the material from the now obliging Brown, Jones and Robinson—glanced from time to time severely, almost disapprovingly, toward her daughter.

“Why, the child’s frivolous,” she thought. “In my day young people looked upon marriage as a very solemn occasion.”

Obviously Miss Rossiter’s bridesmaids also belonged to a newer and more volatile generation, for they were all talking at once and fluttering like so many white pigeons around the cote at feeding-time.

“Oh,” said one of them, familiarly known as “Posie” Stanton, “to get married and then not spend the honeymoon in Paris is like not getting married at all!”

“You should have made Paris one of the conditions, Elinor!”

“And then reveled in gig-top hats and Ristori bonnets!”

"And seen the Empress Eugenie at one of the balls at the Hotel de Ville. They say her dresses are dreams!"

"Yes, I should certainly have insisted on the gig-top hats and Ristori bonnets!" said Miss Rossiter, with a laugh that sounded a little forced.

"How stupid they forgot the orange-blossoms!" exclaimed a miss, who wore a small shepherdess wreath and a string of flowers which fell over her throat like a necklace. "Fancy a bride without orange-blossoms!"

"Oh, Charlie Dalton has gone after them and—here he comes!"—as the front door opened and the servant ushered in a young man who approached without that precipitancy that the importance of the errand seemed to demand.

Tall, broad-shouldered, moving with a certain careless grace, he presented a figure any woman would have regarded twice. And looking twice, the chances are her glance, the second time, would have lingered unduly, if not approvingly, on the well-set head, clear-cut features, and rather cynical dark-blue eyes.

Following this new-comer closely came a short homely little man, with side whiskers, and the kind brown eyes of a spaniel, whose manner betrayed considerable perturbation, if not positive alarm, at being thus suddenly plunged, as it were, into a roomful of vivacious young

ladies; especially as he was seized upon at once by one of the aforesaid intimidating personifications of piquancy, Miss Posie Stanton, the box which he carried promptly confiscated and its contents admiringly surveyed by the whole party.

The bride turned to the first new-comer. Her eyes were bright; above the clear, delicate brow, her brown hair, with its tinge of gold, fulfilled the scriptural requirement, and was a glory to her; with a nervous hand she pushed it back.

"Thank you, Cousin Charlie!" she said lightly. "There was really no need, but mama wanted to make sure. She is so afraid something will go wrong."

"Don't mention it!" he answered.

His glance passed over her from head to foot, a gleam of involuntary admiration replacing the irony in his look. The gown of rich white silk sheathed her in shimmering folds; her figure was replete with girlish grace as she stood there, her hands loosely clasped before her, her head very erect above the white neck. A succession of giggles from Miss Posie and the bridesmaids caused him to look away. His expression changed.

"They are trying on your orange-blossoms, Elinor," he said. "How they all envy you! Each little heart is filled with a big wedding!"

"Yes," she laughed. "It is certainly a very important

event!" And turning, she walked toward the bridesmaids.

He looked after her moodily. The Rossiters, he was well aware, had suffered deterioration, if not collapse, of fortune. Miss Rossiter was rich in all that makes a young girl attractive; Richard Strong—

"Come on, Tom," he called impatiently to the young man who had accompanied him. "The other ushers will be at the church. It's time we were off."

And Tom—or the Shadow, Charlie's Shadow, as he had been dubbed at college—obeyed with an alacrity that denoted a glad desire to escape from the bewildering proximity of Miss Posie and her friends.

"My dear child, are you all ready?" The voice of Mrs. Rossiter impressively dominated the scene. "It wouldn't do to keep all the people waiting," she added.

"The people!" murmured Miss Rossiter, vaguely, as one of the maids arranged the fragrant blossoms and another applied a caressing hand in a final adjustment of tulle. "Will there be many of them?"

"Many of them?" repeated Mrs. Rossiter. "The place will be full. They'll be packed in as close as Jamaica figs!"

"Oh, Mrs. Rossiter!" cried Posie, rushing upon that lady like a miniature whirlwind. "The carriages are at the door!"

"I believe the hour has approached," said Mrs. Rossiter, majestically, drawing herself up. "Elinor, I see your father in the hall. You had better go now."

The adjoining windows and those across the street awoke to sudden life and interest. Alas! that the pride and pomp of the once ceremonial bridal procession of the days of Jacob and Samson has fallen into disuse; that Miss Rowley and Mrs. Crowley and the other interested neighbors could look down in the present instance on an aggregation of carriages only, each vehicle dashing away independent of the other equipages, presumably to a common destination!

On their way to the church, Mr. Rossiter and his daughter were both rather quiet. For the time her vivacity seemed to desert her. He took her hand; she leaned her head a little toward him.

"How would it be," she said suddenly, "if we didn't go to the church at all?"

"My dear!" he exclaimed, startled.

"Isn't mama happy?" she went on irrelevantly.

"And you—"

"I?" she repeated. "Of course!"

He stroked her hand. "You like him, don't you, papa?" she whispered.

"Very much, my dear!"

Within the hymeneal temple crowded an ostentatious

gathering. The majesty of *robes à queue* contrasted with the airiness of feathers. If the diminution of the circumference of skirts to the tiny circle of the waist was suggestive of an hour-glass, the tongues that moved incessantly were like Time. Every lady gleamed as if swathed in delicate armor, for no dress, sack or bonnet was considered complete in those redoubtable days unless plentifully peppered with glass beads. After a wedding or a church service, the sextons, it is chronicled, did a thriving business, picking up beads and bugles from pews and vestibule; and it was a notorious fact that when Mrs. Bullion entered the sacred edifice, the pathway behind her was so strewn that Mr. Bullion, who followed meekly in her wake, set the nerves of the sensitive on edge with the crunching and crushing of his boot-heels.

Everybody was there! All the people the Rossiters knew and many they didn't know. Packed as close as figs, truly, as Mrs. Rossiter had surmised, for Miss Rossiter was a girl of acknowledged beauty and Mr. Strong a man of acknowledged substance. Those shut out—the rank and file to whom the sight of a grand wedding was the great desideratum, and, failing that, the sight of the grand people the next best thing—employed themselves in the endeavor to identify those who flitted across the sidewalk, and then flitted up the steps of the

church, exuding faint odors delicate as the perfumes of Arabia.

Occasionally some one not from Madison Avenue, or the other sacred residential precinct, crossed their range of vision and got in—"Tennessee" Claflin, for example, spiritualistic medium to the great commodore, and her sister, Victoria C., who wore an "Eve hat"—a leaf trimmed around with a feather! And, like the hallowed court of the temple of old, the modern holy place became also invaded by the "money-lenders"; Brewster dressed like a drover, with Avarice written on his face and Religion shining from his eyes; and—

"There goes Jim Jubilee, Junior," said one of those on the outside to his companion, a pert-looking serving-maid, as an alert figure mounted the steps of the religious edifice.

"Who's he?" she asked.

"Don't know who Jim Jubilee is! Jim Fisk, what owns all the banks and all the gold mines and a bench of judges and a bevy of ballet girls."

How long was Miss Rossiter forced to wait at the entrance of the main aisle into the church? It seemed an interminable period. Yet the minister was there, and near the altar—"Behold the bridegroom,—go ye out to meet him!"

Her hand shook a little. Then she heard the organ—

low, deep, reverberating—and, after an interval, found herself walking, apparently through no volition of her own, leaning ever so lightly on her father's arm, her hand like a leaf clinging to a branch that was shaking somewhat itself; wondering at the beauty of the flowers; conscious of the concentrated staring of many, many eyes.

How far was the altar! how strong the perfume of flowers! Flowers, flowers, everywhere! What a bower of them! And through them the luster of the lights beaming, twinkling, flickering! Was she dreaming; were the people illusive; the flowers, fantasies of grace and color? No; she really stood there before an actual altar in the actual glamour of that radiant scene. Not only stood there, but stood and answered soft and low, thrilling the heart of Richard Strong as it had never thrilled before; then suddenly a broken "God bless you, dear!" her father's voice; it was over then; over. Abruptly she awoke and looked around her.

Standing near, Charlie Dalton watched her attentively. Her face was shadowed with a short veil; from each side floated a mass of tulle. The veil shrouded her with mystery; through aroma and redolence he breathed the sweet fragrance of the orange-blossoms; the flowers she held which seemed a part of herself. Then he saw Richard Strong, his face illumined; no conceal-

ment, no mystery there; the light of throbbing passion resting on his powerful features.

The bland, demulcent tones of Mrs. Rossiter's rector died away in the distance; with the best taste and sweetest manner he had tied the nuptial knot. Some ministers would have gone at it roughly, like a sailor with a hempen cord; Mrs. Rossiter's rector performed the task as gently as a lady's maid tying a sash, smoothing out the ends, and adjusting the whole to a pretty effect. First it had been up the aisle; now it was down the aisle. This time Richard Strong walked with the bride, who seemed slenderer in contrast with his stalwart figure, and beautiful as one of the lilies near the altar.

A hum from those without; the patient rank and file at length were again to be rewarded with the sight of the bride! "There she comes!" from nurse-girl and serving-maid; exclamations of praise unqualified, as the couple crossed the sidewalk; honest admiration which gave credence to the adage that all the world loves a bride.

The carriage door was flung open; the bride stepped in and the equipage was about to dash away, when a tall figure pushed through the spectators to the vehicle. It was the clerk, Tim Taplin, hatless and unmistakably excited.

"One moment, sir, there's a little matter of business—"

"It'll have to keep," said Richard Strong.

The carriage drove away and the crowd laughed heartily and even jeered at Tim, who continued to stand there as in a maze.

"It's all very well to say it'll have to keep," muttered the clerk, "but suppose it can't keep?" And Taplin sighed half-disheartedly.

Another than himself was staring after the departing vehicle.

"Well, Tom," said Charlie Dalton, quickly, as his glance met that of his satellite, when the equipage had turned a corner, "what did you think of the performance, old man?"

"Never saw anything go off better," returned the Shadow. "It was a great success."

Charlie's lip curled. "Success? Yes. But devil take it, Tom," he added brusily, "he gets a good bargain!"

CHAPTER V

WHY TIM WAS EXCITED

"Mr. Strong's chief clerk, sir!" Tim Taplin had whispered to the usher of the church some time before the wedding ceremony, and that obliging individual had conducted him to a pew not far from the front.

Here Tim settled back with a sigh of complete satisfaction. Splendid ornamentation, beautiful ladies, dazzling costumes—it was almost as interesting as the nightly spectacle from the gallery at Wallack's! In one sense it seemed even more alluring; at the theater Tim remained perched near the ceiling, remote from the fashionable portion of the audience, from whom he was separated by the inexorable decree of fate—or fortune! In the church, on the contrary, he found himself a veritable part of the *bon ton*, lolling back on a cushioned seat, the soft luxury of which contrasted forcibly with the uncompromising hardness of the wooden benches in the palace of amusement.

For a few moments Tim closed his eyes with a thrill

of sensuous pleasure, while through his mind floated the old couplet:

“Shall I be wafted to the skies
On flowery beds of ease?”

Then, after a brief enjoyment of bodily gratification, he again looked around him.

At first the extraordinary amount of originality allowed in hats impressed him to the exclusion of other ideas, but gradually he became aware that amid the scene of vainglory, faces familiar were set—Tennie Clafflin, who might be “short” on stocks, but was always “long” on spirits, with a rising market for floating banjos and phantom guitars; fair “Jennie June” who sometimes ventured—albeit timidly—on the Street; and—yes—there sat Uncle Samuel Brewster in a pew just in front of him, improving the passing hour, not by studying the worldly spectacle in the church, but by reading from the Good Book which he held upon his knee.

“When Uncle Sam’l quotes the Scriptures, look out for David and his sling,” some one had said of the old man.

Now, however, he was only immersed in the Book. If Avarice sat in his heart six days of the week, Religion ever wrestled with his soul on the seventh day—and sometimes, on other special occasions. Uncle Sam’l’s

face at that moment betrayed unwonted piety and sanctitude.

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. For by grace are ye saved.

The old man closed the book and clasped his hands. "By grace—by grace!" he murmured.

Again he opened the sacred volume, but his finger had slipped from the leaves and his eyes fell on a different chapter. "Talent"—"shekel" caught his eye; "the gold of Sheba!" Now Avarice, a misshapen Caliban, jostled rudely with humility and reverence in Uncle Sam's breast; not only jostled, but grew and grew in misshapen ugliness and deformity.

"The gold of Sheba!" Uncle Sam fell to wondering what it was like; how it was fashioned; how much there was of it. Illusive indefiniteness of the Holy Book! A shekel weighed, he knew, just three hundred and eighty-four barleycorns. But—how much did a barleycorn weigh?

From consideration of the barleycorn to the conspiracy against Richard Strong, hatched in the church, represented but one of those processes of association of ideas by which many human inspirations—for better or worse—are evolved. Three hundred and eighty-four barleycorns made about a handful, thought Uncle Sam; in imagination he held them in one hand and the shekel in

the other, then fell in his mind's eye to examining the coin. A pot of manna on one side—Uncle Sam'l had read all the Good Book could tell him about gold and silver, the "king's weight" and the "weight of the tabernacle"—on the other side, Aaron's rod!

Why Aaron's rod, pondered Uncle Sam'l. A rod was something to smite with; to use upon your enemy. Gold, then, was it also a lash? Uncle Sam'l knew it was. Had he not often felt the castigation of it? He began figuring how much it had cost him at different times, when some one had caught him in the pillory on the Street; how many talents and shekels would it make; how many grains of barleycorn?

One occasion arose in his mind: when he had set himself against Richard Strong, and when like a giant, resistless, that builder and promoter of values had stridden steadfastly to his end.

What a scourging that had been! He felt the stings of it yet. In Uncle Sam'l's hand the imaginary coin he held grew and changed; Aaron's rod became a serpent, the personification of all that is wise and wily. The serpent crawled up to his shoulder and hissed in his ear, hissed and whispered, and its voice was dulcet and mellifluous. The listener, with the book on his knee, a rapt, if not holy, expression on his face, seemed to see ten thousand talents and ten thousand Aaron's

rods all suddenly turned into serpents, before which Richard Strong was fleeing.

Uncle Sam'l's worn and wrinkled face gleamed and glowed with unhallowed joy. A field of serpents let loose on his enemy—what a retribution!

"Uncle Sam'l," said a stammering voice by his side, "y-y-you are very de-v-v-vout this morning!"

It was the witty Travers, the courtly jester of the Street, who thus rudely awakened the old man from his avenging dream.

"I suppose you are r-r-reading where it says to the p-p-plundering money-lenders: *Thou shalt not have d-d-divers weights in thy bag.*"

"Travers," said Uncle Sam'l, a deep and cunning purpose shining from his watery eyes, "do you remember how Strong gave me a drubbing once? Well, I've got a rod in pickle for him." He could not get Aaron out of his mind. "I've got a rod in pickle for him," he repeated. "Strong is going away. It will cost him more than railroad fares and hotel bills. It will cost him a few shares in some of his railroads. You had better get on the right side of the market. I have got it all planned out."

In spite of the place in which he found himself Travers could hardly restrain his laughter.

"You hoary old s-s-sinner!" he replied. "So that's

w-w-what you got out of the Holy Book! It m-m-may be an inspiration, but—not of the L-L-Lord!”

“A honeymoon,” chuckled Uncle Sam’l, “is a luxury few of us can afford.” And he closed the Book and put it back on the rack.

Neither of the speakers had noticed Tim Taplin behind them; if they had noticed him it is doubtful if they would have remembered who he was. Tim was but one of that army of small workers whose name is legion. But he had eyes to see, ears to hear with, and a moderate capacity of intelligence which, when not pushed to too high pressure, responded fairly to the occasion. It is undeniable that in the present instance the pressure was great; a little more horse-power seemed demanded than the engine of understanding was capable of, but Tim did his best.

He began to realize that Uncle Sam’l, a tough, wiry old prize-fighter, was about to enter the arena again; that he was looking for retaliation and Richard Strong. Tim made this out after a fevered contest in his own mind with the pros and cons. The clerk, also, remembered the “drubbing” his employer had bestowed upon the other; he had a vivid recollection of how Uncle Sam’l had sought to overthrow, upset and annihilate the carefully conceived, elaborately worked-out plans of Richard Strong; and how the latter had opened wide the throttle

and driven to success with a force that had swept aside all opposition and carried consternation to the camp of the obstructionists. But Uncle Sam'l had crawled up again and now was once more in excellent position for battle.

"Strong is going away. I have it all planned out."

These were the ominous words that rang again and again in Tim's brain. What planned out? A campaign of some kind, of course, against his employer. The "right side of the market" could only be interpreted that Richard Strong would be on the wrong side. Tim had an abiding faith in Richard Strong, single. But—

Seneca, seeing a house falling to the earth, looked around and observed: "Where is the woman?" Tim had only to look up to see her. There she was, walking up the aisle; how fair! yet—Tim had his doubts.

He gazed at Uncle Sam'l. That individual was regarding her intently—a keen, knowing, penetrating glance! Was he measuring the strength of Richard Strong's absorption in her beauty? Uncle Sam'l chuckled; her every charm was his ally. And Richard Strong—railroads had no substance for him; he was now engaged in the fantastical occupation of castle-building! Uncle Sam'l unctuously clasped his hands before him and rubbed them. She was more comely than he expected, although he had heard there had been many well-favored women in the Rossiter family. He

did not envy the groom the possession of such a bride; he rejoiced with him, as it were; his mood reëchoed for the other the praises of the Canticles in her behalf.

"I must get to Mr. Strong; I must warn him," thought Tim.

But how? The words of the rector were already floating through the sacred edifice; in a moment the ceremony would be finished and Richard Strong and his bride would be gone.

"Excuse me, please!" whispered Tim to his neighbor. "A sudden indisposition—" and rising, he passed before him and out of the church.

Fortunately the aisle was thickly carpeted; his footsteps were noiseless, and his sudden departure attracted little attention. How could it be otherwise when the eyes of the multitude were riveted upon a slender figure in white; when the ears of the entire gathering were intent to catch the answer of her lips?

Thus Tim stood waiting when Richard Strong and his bride at length drew near. The clerk's heart throbbed; he had forgotten his hat in his anxiety to get out. It was the hardest task he had ever set himself to perform, and he held back until the last moment.

But finally he nerved himself to the ordeal, and—"It'll have to keep!" That was all the satisfaction he had received for the important information he had to impart.

A flutter of the bride's veil, through which the girl's white face shone, and the carriage was off. The congregation poured out, with clatter and chatter—a bibble of praise, and a babble of dispraise—an animated stream of loquaciousness and color that divided and subdivided itself into no less mercurial streamlets which, in turn, themselves flowed unquietly into many streets, and gradually ran themselves out into various houses and mansions.

What should he do now? asked Tim. Risk another rebuff? After all, perhaps, was he not exaggerating the danger? Did not Richard Strong know how to defend himself? The “right side of the market”! It might mean but a point or two; not a collapse—one of those small victories, the effect of which would be as ephemeral as unmomentous. A few lambs might be sheared, but the leaders—would they not come out comparatively uninjured? Such skirmishes were of daily occurrence and—

Thus the mechanism of Tim's understanding, which had run so erratically during the church service, now relapsed to its normal activity—or inactivity.

“I'll wait until to-morrow,” he said. “I've made a mountain out of a mole-hill and—an idiot out of myself.”

And Tim went back to find his hat!

CHAPTER VI

AT GAY SARATOGA

"Bride and groom! There's no mistaking her."

"Nor him!"

At Saratoga, in those gala days, when society threw over the popular resort the radiance of its reflected glory, the pleasure of watching the people arrive at the hotels was not among the least of the many attractions. From far and wide came the guests, a cosmopolitan, complex gathering, all seemingly bent on the enjoyment of a perpetual festival, and, incidentally, drinking the waters. The great spa was then the playground of the country, where grown-up people, as well as children, capered and frolicked, and only the man of many ailments was relegated to a special background of his own.

With a rattle and a rumble, on the night of Miss Rossiter's wedding, the stage had stopped before the front entrance of one of the principal hotels and was emptying itself of its load of living freight inside, and

its dead freight outside—portable Noah's-ark sort of trunks, called "saratogas"—when closely following the greater vehicle out of the darkness came a carriage, which drew up sharply behind the coach and from which emerged a stalwart, rather thick-set gentleman, and a young girl. From the coach to the carriage the staring gaze of the assembled watchers was transferred, and slowly, beneath this general survey, the pair mounted the steps, moving into the bright light from innumerable gas jets on the broad veranda. The girl was tall, tastefully dressed, and—such seemed the consensus of opinion—carried herself well, rather proudly, perhaps. She looked tired, as if the journey had been long, and appeared to take no special interest in the brilliant scene with which she was suddenly confronted. Nor was her manner marked with embarrassment at the almost silent contemplation of the crowd; she acted either unconscious of the observant, inquisitive eyes, or indifferent to them.

"Yes; their wedding trip!"

"Where are they from?"

"New York—you couldn't mistake her!"

Amid such comment, the man, followed by his fair companion and several porters bearing hand luggage, made his way across the extensive lobby to the desk and

inquired for the proprietor. That gentleman came forward at once with an urbane smile and conciliatory manner.

"I telegraphed you to reserve rooms," said the newcomer.

"What name?"

"Richard Strong."

The hotel man's smile grew broader; his hand shot out affably; he beamed on the young woman. How many brides and grooms had he sheltered in that vast hostelry!

"Just so," he said. "I have reserved for you part of the Vanderbilt suite. You will find the rooms all ready and waiting for you, Mr. Strong."

And that gentleman did. High-walled, spacious apartments fairly blazed with the brilliant illumination from crystal chandeliers. Thick, brightly-flowered carpets lent cheerfulness to the rooms, while massive, open-carved, rosewood chairs and sofas were in keeping with the palatial expanse of the apartments.

"Well, here we are!" said Richard Strong. "In spite of the hotel runners and porters at the depot! Confess, Elinor, they rather startled you."

"They were a little persistent."

"Persistent!" he exclaimed. "Donnybrook Fair is order and quiet, compared to that depot when a train comes in. But—" glancing around him cheerfully when

the porters had withdrawn and they were left alone—"they are not sparing of their lights."

Her gaze followed his to the great chandeliers ablaze with scores of flaring gas jets.

"It's quite like a fête, isn't it?" he continued.

"Would you mind turning out some of them?" she asked, with a faint smile, as she sank down on one of the settees.

"Mind? Not a bit!"—and suited the action to the word. "How is it now? And the rooms—are they to your liking?"

"They are large enough, aren't they?" she answered mechanically.

"Everything is large here," he laughed. "It is the proud boast of the proprietor that he has verandas a mile long and twenty-two acres of carpet."

She made no reply to his comment and he looked at her quickly, noticing she had not yet removed her hat or wrap.

"You are tired, Elinor?"

"Yes," she confessed, passing her hand across her brow.

A sympathetic expression shone from his eyes. He gazed down at her proudly, anxiously. Perhaps that consciousness of his own bodily strength made him but the more solicitous for her. He smiled gently.

"It has been a hard day for you. Nowadays to get married is an ordeal for any woman. But you went through it bravely, and, as Mrs. Rossiter would say—" a gleam of humor shining from beneath his heavy brows—"it went off without a break!"

She studied the carpet attentively. With her head down-bent, her hair threw a shadow on her face—a shadow that darkened her eyes.

"I don't know how you'll like it here," he continued, "but it is a little early for the sea-shore. Besides—" with a laugh—"all brides nowadays want to go to Saratoga!"

At his laugh she glanced up, drawing her gloves nervously through her hands.

"The ride on the train seems to have given me a headache," she answered irrelevantly.

With real concern he studied her.

"What you need," he said, "is rest. You will be yourself to-morrow. You have had too much to think of to-day."

"Perhaps that is it," she assented.

"Yes, that's what you need," he repeated decisively. "Rest!" A moment he hesitated. "I—I think I'll go down and look after the trunks," he added.

"If you would!" she said, and arose quickly.

His glance responded with sudden passion. She was

very near, very dear, very fair to him, and abruptly he took her in his arms. For a moment she lay impassive, inert; then he released her and stood holding her by the hands.

"You do look pale," he said. Paler than I thought at first. Are you sure there is nothing you want?"

"No," she replied; "nothing!"

"Then I'll go and see to things."

He turned, glanced back at her once, and was gone. The girl walked to the mantel, leaned upon it. The day had been long; the ride on the train, fatiguing. It is true the trip had been accomplished with exceptional celerity; the engineer, under instructions from the master of Harlem, had opened wide the throttle. But in those days before the consolidation of the Hudson River and New York Central, heavy, solid vestibule trains were unknown, and the tracks were lightly ballasted. In consequence they had dashed on with many a jolt, jostle and bump.

At times Elinor had held her breath; then had put her hands to her ears as a piercing shriek marked their progress. She recalled brief intervals of rest at the stations, followed—alas!—by more shocks and knocks.

"Isn't this rather fast?" she had ventured to ask.

"I should say 'so!'" Richard had answered with enthu-

siasm. "Almost forty miles an hour. We'll beat the record to Albany."

"Beat the record!" The journey seemed designed for that especial purpose. She remembered thinking that she should not have minded going slower; in a less modern—more romantic fashion, perhaps. The golden chariot, the noisy monster—how unlike they were! In the books honeymoons were full of flowers, sunshine, perfume; they two that day had raced madly in a cloud of dust, dirt and cinders! Slowly, mournfully, the shades of twilight had gradually descended on the world, and the depression of the hour had seemed to lay its finger on her spirits.

She could feel it now, and, deeply, questioningly, she looked at herself in the mirror, the while the events of the past few months marshalled themselves in her mind. For some time she stood there without moving, her face very sober and thoughtful. Then suddenly, with an impatient gesture, she turned away and raised her hands to remove her hat.

Meanwhile Richard Strong had walked down the hall and was slowly descending the stairway.

"It is only a little fatigue," he told himself, and, re-pairing to the office, made inquiries about his baggage.

As he moved across the lower corridor the sound of music caught his ear, and turning, he found himself at

the entrance of the ball-room. At Saratoga, where dressing was an all-absorbing matter to the fair sex, the dance, or the masquerade in the evenings, afforded the supreme opportunity for the display of gowns. The *Entre Nous* waltz or the Kangaroo gallop found, therefore, many devotees every evening in the week—Sundays excepted—while those who preferred something newer became ready victims of the fascinating and alluring “dip.”

It was the “dip” that engrossed the company, as Mr. Strong stood near the doorway. Ladies with bare shoulders, dipped; matrons whose arms and necks gleamed with the luster of gems in barbaric profusion, dipped; young girls in the splendor of gowns from the inexhaustible arks, or trunks, they had brought with them, dipped; black-garbed figures, with white gloves and streaming coat tails, each one as like his neighbor as one jumping-jack resembles another, dipped.

Above the varied faces of the revelers, the graceful and the grotesque figures, Richard Strong, in imagination, saw one face and form. He regretted now he had brought her there, in the midst of that glittering, pretentious throng, and wished he had sought some quieter spot, some more modest retreat, for their honeymoon. But he had thought to please her, and, after all, there were many beautiful walks and drives, the lakes, and the

wayside resorts. One could be in the showy world and yet not of it; beyond the crowd and the hum and "the shock of men"!

Conceiving a sudden distaste for the lavish spectacle, he strode back into the hall and out upon the veranda. Here, also, were many people, old and young; well-dressed and over-dressed. Here, also, sounded many voices, engaged in discussing the merits of the waters; the relative speed of this or that horse; the croquet contests and bowling tournaments, or a forthcoming church social, managed by enterprising local women.

From the streets, metropolitan in their gaiety and life, came the rumbling of carriages and the pattering of hoofs. Laughing boisterously, a merry party from the lake and from a repast of trout and woodcock with an after-dash of famous old rum, drove up in a large vehicle.

"Phew!" cried one of them. "Fishing is expensive around here. Think of a dollar a pound for all you catch out of the private ponds!"

"Well, it didn't take many dollars to pay for your catch!" retorted another. "You whipped the stream all day and—"

"Let's go into the ball-room! We're just in time for champagne and birds."

"Champagne! Give me some of old Moon's Vera Cruz!"

Slowly Richard Strong arose, looked at his watch, and, reëntering the hotel, sought their rooms. The apartment wherein he found himself was deserted; upon the mantel lay her hat, which seemed to him a part of herself because she had worn it. He noticed her gloves beside it, and picking them up, regarded them with a smile. They were slightly fragrant; he wondered what perfume it was she used, knowing but little about such matters. Something very sweet and subtle, at any rate! He touched them to his lips; then stepping to a door, pushed it open gently and looked in.

The light was low. Was she sleeping? Her hair with its golden tints outspread in flowing profusion. One hand lay on the pillow. He approached; stood there—how long? Her eyes were closed; her breathing regular.

"Elinor," he said softly.

She did not answer. He bent; dared to take her hand gently. Upon her finger gleamed the ring—his ring; the band that bound her to him for ever and ever!

"Elinor," he whispered.

Still silence. He listened; she seemed sleeping like a child—a tired child. A moment longer he waited; then, dropping her hand, he left as quietly as he had entered.

In the dark parlor Richard Strong seated himself near the open window. A flood of moonlight fell on the floor; the balmy air stirred the clambering vines about the casement. Like the beating of a pulse, a distant fountain tinkled. In the grove many lights gleamed and glowed; figures in white passed and repassed. The faint sound of merriment below, the snatch of a song, mingled with the distant strains of music from the ball-room.

He lighted a cigar; smoked it; touched the match to another. He had no definite consciousness of time; the moments passed; fewer figures were seen below; the voices grew less audible. Only nature's accents became more perceptible; a cooing wood-note; the sound of insects; the rustling of leaves, and, from afar, as from the horizon itself, a droning intonation, as if the earth were all tonality.

In the solemn peace of that august solitude, the stars, to Richard Strong, were first very bright, then dim. So they had shone for him often in his boyhood days when at night in the saddle he had followed the cattle on the plains. At times they were a thousand eyes; then closed; then opened, twinkled, and shut once more. "Boy, you're asleep in the saddle," his father had said; and he had shaken himself, only ere long to have the same mischievous trick played upon him by those roguish eyes; closing, opening; closing, opening! Closing—

CHAPTER VII

THE TELEGRAM AND ITS SEQUEL

A strain from the oboes, a melody from the clarinets, a defiant flourish from the horns, and all the instruments caught up the overture, and the exuberant joyousness of Verdi—the early Verdi of our forefathers—permeated the pleasure-grounds. As the band began its morning concert the capacious hostelrys gradually emptied themselves of their thousand and one guests. Those who had dipped too assiduously the night before now repaired to the medicinal springs, where the lad with the glass deftly served the scores of comers. Nature, prodigal nature, invited all mankind and womankind to taste of the healing waters, and those who accepted were divided into two classes: the drinkers through conviction and the drinkers through habit.

“They *are* bride and groom!”

The dowagers were beginning their matutinal gossip on the verandas.

“You read about the Strong-Rossiter wedding?”

"Oh, *that* is Miss Rossiter!"—with an accent which might mean much, or nothing.

"Yes—you know they say—"

"Dear me! How interesting!"

"And that isn't all—"

Innocently ignorant of the many shafts, sharpened with imputation, that were flying about their heads, Richard Strong and his bride descended the steps. The day was in harmony with the sparkling character of the concert; the fantasia of the band found an echo in the minstrelsy of the birds; the aria from the instruments kept pace with innumerable ariettas from bough and branch. The sunbeams, sifting through the overhanging foliage, made brighter the moving spots of color—morning gowns of many hues and parasols of all the tints of the rainbow! Here and there an exaggerated style of toilet seemed but the more grotesque in the pitiless white light of that perfect day. Gentility running away from vulgarity had in many cases been fairly overtaken.

From these extremists in fashion's realm Richard Strong's glance turned approvingly to the girl by his side. Her dress, simple and light in color, adorned without detracting from a figure straight as a reed, graceful and untrammelled. Her face still lacked some of its delicate rose-tint—a comparative want of color

that made her eyes look larger, darker, but she held her head with its old air of proud wilfulness.

To Richard Strong it seemed that all the assemblage must be looking at her and admiring her, and—yes, even envying him the possession of so precious, if elusive and mysterious, a holding. He who had sought and won properties, valuable in the standard of weights and measures, with an impassive countenance, now betrayed on his features the consciousness of the new dignities and joys attendant on this latest acquisition.

“You are not disappointed in Saratoga, Elinor?” he said.

“There are a good many people,” she answered vaguely.

“That’s what makes it—Saratoga!”

They had paused before one of the fashionable shops, a flashing branch establishment of a New York firm.

“Do you see anything you want?” he continued, following her glance.

“No,” she replied quickly, turning away.

“Then you are different from the conventional—bride!” he went on, half-gaily, half-fondly. “I imagined the shops would have a great fascination for you, but—you have everything, or do not care for anything you haven’t! If you think it uninteresting or too spec-

tacular here," he added, "we can go somewhere else in a few days. All I want is to please you."

She raised her eyes without answering, looked at him quickly and then glanced down.

"What are those children selling?" she asked irrelevantly. "Bags of confectionery?"

"No; only the famous fried potatoes of Saratoga!"

He smiled as he spoke; then bowed to an acquaintance. There were many California people in that great gathering; powerful knights of finance who had wrested their golden spears and bucklers from the earth, and now came, Sir Launcelots for valor, a-tilting against the East. For the good knights' ladies, the well-known spa offered opportunities to win a way into the society of the metropolis itself, and, be it said to the credit of the fair wives and daughters from the land of the Golden Gate, they were almost as successful in their quest as their lords had been in theirs.

Richard Strong knew many of these western men and introduced Elinor here and there.

"My wife—Mrs. Strong!"

He looked more erect, more commanding, as he spoke.

"You see as many acquaintances on Saratoga's Broadway as on the real Broadway," he said, when they had resumed their walk after a second exchange of the compliments of the day.

But she did not appear to take amiss meeting and speaking with people. On the contrary, it was he, not she, who turned from them first. Once he even said: "Shall we go on, Elinor?" and she had responded readily, when some one of the party, a bluff man from the plains, made a jesting comment that sent the blood to her face.

As for Richard Strong, he only looked at her and laughed, and breathed deep and long, as inhaling all the happiness of that place. She drew away a little, but he moved nearer, and soon she found herself walking close to him along a narrow path. Behind them lay the gay and busy thoroughfare; before them appeared the hills, vernal with evergreen, and, farther beyond, the mountains, clearly outlined upon the background of blue.

"How beautiful it all is!" As he spoke his gaze, which had been bent upon the distant undulations, returned to her; he glanced down at her hair, her face, her gown bathed with the flickering light; the few flowers at her waist.

"You mustn't mind Thayer and his little joke," he went on. "He's a blunt sort of fellow; a true westerner, though, with a big heart and a heavy hand. He's had quite a history, too!"

And in terse language he described the man and his associates, from which narrative of golden success, re-

markable as an Arabian tale, he was unconsciously led to speak of himself and his own plans and projects, unbosoming himself as he had never done before.

Did she hear? Was she listening? This world of his was a new and a strange world to her. Stocks; bonds; railroads; money! A little frown had gathered on her brow.

"It seems odd my speaking to you of all these matters," observed Richard Strong, after a while, not noticing her preoccupation. "I have been so accustomed to keeping everything to myself all my life that it has become almost second nature not to talk, but to think. When a boy, I was silent, taciturn; 'sullen,' they called me. 'Richard's mind is a blank,' said my father. Perhaps it was. I wish he were here to see me now," he added suddenly.

"You were very fond of him?" she asked, arousing herself.

"We lived in the saddle together; drove the cattle from Texas to Missouri; when he was shot in the Wilderness, as they called one of the bad spots in Arkansas, I buried him with my own hands. It was a boy who knelt by the grave and whispered the prayer his mother had taught him; it was a man who rode away!"

"Did you—ever find the person that shot him?"

From beneath his heavy brow a look, like a spark, flashed to her.

"Yes," he said simply.

"I should imagine you would always seek vengeance, if any person wronged you." She regarded him quickly.

"Vengeance?" he replied. "No."

"Only justice!" she returned.

He was silent.

But the gladness of the day soon won him from the thoughtful mood those memories evoked. Around them the leaves scarcely whispered in the thicket, and the hush of a solemn peace pervaded the deeper recesses of the forest. A little brown thrasher, shy and retiring in its habits, flew far away on their approach; a gray squirrel scampered higher, and, from its lofty perch, barked fearlessly.

The sequestered path seemed made but for them, yet other couples had walked that way—doubtless wrapped in a transport of mutual inclination—and Richard Strong, with a smile, called her attention to sundry hearts and initials crudely carved on tree and sapling, some newly done; a few old, almost obliterated. He even insisted upon stopping and deciphering those amatory efforts of the sighing swains who had preceded them down that redolent forest path, and once, while doing so, his hand

closed upon hers. She laughed nervously and glanced around.

"See!" she said.

Through the trees, cradled in the bosom of the hills, they could look upon the shining expanse of a little lake whose placid surface was unmarred by a ripple.

"Let us go there!" she added, and half-ran down into the glen. His eye lighted as he followed her.

"Elinor!" he called.

"El-i-nor!—" came the answering echo.

Again he called. She seemed surrounded by voices summoning her from every side. With a scream, a water-bird arose from the bushes on the bank and shot out straight as an arrow across the water.

"Did it surprise you?" he asked, approaching.

Her expression answered him. The half-startled look had a charm of its own; her cheeks wore the eloquent hue of the rose; her lips were parted from the exercise. He could not take his eyes from her.

Nearer he came; nearer—

"'Scuse me, sah! Am yo' Mistah Strong?"

A strange voice broke in upon them, and, turning, Richard Strong confronted one of the porters of the hotel.

"'Scuse me, sah," repeated that person, displaying a formidable array of white teeth, "but I'se been huntin'

foh yo' ebberywhere, Mistah Strong! Done thought I might find yo' neah the echo! Dey always comes heah de fust day!"

"Well, now that you've found me, what do you want?"

"Heah am a telegram for yo', sah! De clerk told me to find yo', eben if I hab to hunt ober de whole country. Pretty near done dat, sah, already!"

"How long ago did it come?"

"Half an hour, sah! I'se done been huntin' ebber since!"

Mechanically Richard Strong took it. The lad still remained, shifting from one foot to the other.

"Done been huntin'—" he began again, when the recipient of the message handed him something. With a grin broader than ever the dusky messenger vanished.

"What can it be?" said Richard Strong, opening the envelope. "It's in cipher at any rate," he continued, glancing at the missive. "Would you mind going back to the hotel with me, Elinor?"

She, too, looked at the telegram and her face changed a little.

"Oh, no," she answered carelessly.

"I left my code in the room," he explained. "This may be something important—certainly, it's a long message! I wonder"—as they retraced their steps—"if it has anything to do with Tim and what he wanted to tell



me yesterday in front of the church. He seemed excited."

An indefinable light came into her eyes.

"Didn't he say something about—business?"

"Yes. But I can not think it a pressing matter. Everything seemed in good shape when we left, although"—thoughtfully—"yesterday, as they say, is ancient history in the Street!"

Once more in their rooms, after a brief search, he found his code, and, seating himself with the little book and the telegram before a desk, worked silently for some time. Standing near the window Elinor mutely watched him. The sunlight threw a strong glow on his features emphasizing that which was massive and bringing out all the resolute characteristics of a man who had never spared himself—or others. It was a hard face when he set himself to a task, she thought; too hard! She observed how slowly he proceeded, searching for each word carefully, verifying it, and setting down its equivalent neatly with the pencil he held in his hand. His countenance betrayed no emotion; only once or twice he started a little. His mouth grew firmer; his jaw more pronounced; a harshness of expression that now awoke a secret resentment in her breast.

Abruptly he arose.

"What is it?" she asked mechanically.

"My absence has been the signal for attack," he answered tersely.

"What sort of attack?"

"A cowardly, despicable one!"

Deliberately, heavily, he strode across the room; stood with his back to her a moment, and then returned.

"Elinor," he said suddenly, and his voice sounded to her as harsh as his face had looked, "we must leave here!"

"Leave?" She could not conceal a start of surprise. "Where for?"

"For New York. At once!"

She regarded him steadily. If she had heard and divined all he had said, she heeded not its significance; only his expressed determination to leave abruptly for home. This fact, without the rhyme or reason for it, became paramount in her mind to every other consideration.

"But," she said, rising, her hands clasped nervously, a fine irony in her voice, "for business—a matter of a few stocks—a little money—you would give up our wed—our trip?"

He made no reply. Looking down at the carpet, motionless, he was considering possible combinations, probable moves, and the strategic position his enemies had already taken. He again glanced over the telegram. Had

he read aright? Yes; even his honor had been attacked. Hints were rife of mismanagement; of funds improperly applied.

His silence, his disregard of her, caused her features to harden. In her tense mental mood, every act, every expression, bore an exaggerated significance. Something seemed to rise in her throat and choke her. What she endeavored so hard to hide threatened to overpower her. She yet strove to fight it down. Suddenly he saw her face.

"Elinor!" he cried.

"Well?" she said, very white.

He paused. His mind moved slowly from one object to another.

"You do not mind? You—"

"I? Not in the least," she answered coldly.

Romance!—business!—the modern prince would turn back with his bride for—a little money.

"It is harder for me than for you to give it up," he said. "You do not know what it has been to me—being here with you!—Elinor, darling!—"

Perhaps it was the strangeness in her eyes, but he caught her suddenly to his breast; kissed her passionately again and again, as if by physical force he would hold her to him for ever.

A moment: an eternity! A terrible weakness; a ter-

rible strength—and suddenly she tore herself from him and sank into a chair, her head buried against the arm. Sobs shook her figure.

“Elinor,” he said.

Compassion, tenderness, transformed his face.

“Elinor,” he repeated, in pitying wonder. “What is it?”

“Oh,” she said, “can’t you see—it is all a mistake—we can never understand each other—never—I do not love you as I should—I can’t—I can’t—”

CHAPTER VIII

AN INTERRUPTED HONEYMOON

Richard Strong forgot about the attack on his stocks of which he had just learned; he forgot even the covert and scurrilous charges against himself. The telegram, so important a moment before, fell unheeded from his hand. He, who usually knew his ground with a moral certitude and stood on that ground with characteristic positiveness, unexpectedly found himself adrift, out of his reckoning. Certainly Elinor had prepared for him a great surprise; the greatest surprise he had ever experienced. At first he doubted the reality of it and looked at her with almost pathetic wonderment, but the sight of her figure, her abandonment, brought the poignant truth home to him.

"Get at the facts; the bare, unsentimental facts!" he had always said to his clerks.

Now he seemed to be saying it to himself as he stood there at fault. The bare, unsentimental facts! He had been used to hard blows and hard thrusts all his days, but nothing to the pain of this; he had been accustomed to

giving as well as taking in the rude buffetings of life, but here suddenly he found himself powerless and unarmed.

"I do not love you—I can not!"

These were her words. What did they mean? The meaning seemed transparent enough. Yet she was with him here—she had not said no to him that night when he had told her of his love. The ceremony had been performed yesterday—that, too, was real—stamped on his heart, ineffaceably! For Richard Strong, the rite and service was no mere mummary; no patter of sentences; no dead and forgotten language, for all observance of its literal purport! Every passage of the hymeneal bond had been fraught with holy, solemn significance! He regarded her now almost mechanically.

"Why," he said, "did you marry me?"

She did not stir, nor did she reply. After her outburst, words seemed to fail. She felt confused; incomprehensible even to herself.

"When you knew you did not—care for me?"

"That is it," she said. "If I had known—" Her voice died into indefiniteness.

"And now—you know?"

Again she did not answer and his face darkened; a flash came into his eyes. He touched her arm.

"Won't you —sit up?"

His touch and the change in his voice aroused her. It was not a request he uttered, but a command.

She dashed her hand across her eyes, and raising her head quickly, met his look.

“Why—did you marry me?”

His glance probed her. It was no longer the lover’s gaze, but that of Richard Strong, the man of affairs, bent upon arriving at the truth—the disastrous truth, perhaps—but the truth.

Once more rebellion stirred within her; his bearing was **that** of the master; he made her feel like a child.

“I—don’t know,” she said defiantly.

Anger mingled with impatience on his face. He had always known his own mind; he had no understanding of a person who did not know his or hers. And to have entered into such a bargain blindly, or lightly! He had never in his life assumed an obligation he intended to waive; he had never put his name to a pact, the conditions of which he did not mean honestly to fulfil.

He laughed now—very harshly. “Is that the best answer you can make?”

For a moment he continued to regard her, his jaw set, his face wearing that expression that earlier had awakened her hostile response, then turning abruptly, he walked toward the window.

His foot touched the telegram—he started—picked it

up. His enemies had suddenly become figures of straw ; their onslaught—as nothing ! Contemptuously he tore the message into little bits and threw them into the waste-basket ; then stood near the window with head down-bent and knitted brows. Since she would not answer him, he strove, in his straightforward way, to find the answer for himself.

Without moving, Elinor watched him, her gaze very fixed and bright, her whole attitude one of defiance. Suddenly she started ; his face had changed and its stern pallor smote her. Her eyes fell ; he did care—really care. A revulsion of feeling seemed all at once to overpower her ; a sense of shame for herself ; the desire to check the trend of his thoughts ; to retract her words—

At that moment, he turned and again stood before her.

“When you smiled at me that day in the window, had anything happened to influence your life?”

She looked up with uncomprehending eyes, striving to collect herself.

“Anything of a—practical nature?”

He was thinking of Mr. Rossiter’s visit to him now ; the unsalable southern securities that gentleman had asked him about ; Mrs. Rossiter’s uncompromising worldliness.

"Of a practical nature?" she repeated. "I—don't understand."

All at once the purport of his meaning struck her and the blood rushed to her face; her eyes dilated.

"Oh, no!" she cried, "I did not—" and stopped.

"Why, then?"

Her hands tightened on the arm of the chair; her color receded. What could she answer? How could she explain? She felt sure of nothing now save her own abasement.

A moment he waited, then turned away. What mattered it, after all, why? His pride stopped at further investigation. She had said their marriage was a mistake; that she did not care for him, he thought bitterly. That should suffice. When he spoke again his voice was businesslike.

"Do you need any one to help you with your packing?"

She made no sign that she heard him and he went to the bell-rope; pulled it. The same colored lad that had brought him the telegram appeared in response to the summons.

"Send up my bill at once; have my trunks taken to the depot; call in ten minutes for several telegrams I wish to send."

"Yes, sah; thank yo', sah!"

The door closed; he turned to his desk and began writ-

ing rapidly; one message to Tim Taplin, apprising that person of his coming, another to his lawyer, a third to a certain broker, his face becoming more savagely aggressive as he proceeded.

At least his opponents would not look for his return. They had probably reasoned no bridegroom was apt lightly to tear himself from his bride on the second day of the honeymoon to engage in a battle of prices; but they had overlooked the weight of the personal imputations, which had really first moved Richard Strong to that radical determination.

Mechanically and with a white face, Elinor set about the work of packing. There was little to be done; only one or two of the dresses had been removed from the trunks. Those more elaborate creations in laces and draperies over which Posie Stanton had raved and exclaimed, and which Mrs. Rossiter had tenderly deposited in their respective trays with proud satisfaction and fond anticipations of the appearance her daughter would make at fashionable Saratoga, were doomed not to see the light of day at that brilliant summer resort. She had but performed this task; replaced the trays and closed and locked her trunks when a knocking at the door brought a waiter with a bill.

Mr. Strong took the account and handed the man the messages he had written.

"Send these immediately. They are important. You have a telegraph office in the hotel?"

"Yes, sir."

"And call a carriage in"—he consulted a time-table—"half an hour."

The man departed; Richard Strong's glance rested coldly on his wife.

"Are you ready?" he said.

"Yes," she answered in a low tone.

"Well," he went on, "have you thought it all out—what is best to be done?"

"No-o," she answered. "That is—of course I shall go home."

He sprang to his feet. An intense emotion shone from his eyes; his hands clenched.

"Of course you will *not* go home!"

"But—"

"That much you owe to me. I do not believe in lightly wed, lightly separated. Neither do I care for the stigma of a separation."

"Can you not see," she returned calmly, but with an effort, "it is impossible for me to remain—to accept anything from you, after—"

"You should have thought about that before you made it imperative for you to do so."

Her calmness forsook her. "I can't; I can't!" she cried passionately.

"Unfortunately you have no choice."

"You are cruel—unreasonable!" she exclaimed, straightening herself. "It is impossible! What you ask—"

Her words acted upon him like a spark; in spite of herself she shrank from the anger, the almost ungovernable passion with which he regarded her. He took a step forward.

"Cruel! You!"

Her head sank into her hands. He stopped; checked the words that had been about to spring from his lips.

"There is no need for any heroics or hysterics," he said in measured tones. "I do not ask; I demand! It is my right. Have you any further objections to advance?"

She did not raise her head or reply, and after a moment he added: "This subject, then, is closed between us."

Half an hour later, the loungers in the lobby observed Mr. and Mrs. Strong coming down from their rooms, followed by the porters with bags, satchels and other hand luggage. The bumping and thumping of the great trunks that had preceded their appearance had apprised those in the neighborhood of the office of the forthcoming departure of the bridal couple. At the front door of the

hotel the proprietor himself stood with cordial and expansive mien, as befitted the speeding of guests so solvent in the world's goods.

"What do you think of that?"

The veranda dowagers were watching the couple enter their carriage.

"Some one told me it was on account of business."

"And only the second day of their wedding trip!"

"She looked to me as if she had been crying about it!"

"What bride wouldn't—to be packed off home—"

Slam! the carriage door shut. A crack of the whip—
Elinor's honeymoon had come to an end.

CHAPTER IX

THE RETURN OF RICHARD STRONG

It was a period of wondrous awakening; the *renaissance* of America. The dark days of a house divided against itself had been succeeded by the new birth. The reconstruction of the Union, and the restoration of the states, lately in rebellion, to their political rights, had imparted the healing touch to old industries and a strong incentive for new ones. A wholesome rejuvenescence swept over the land. The reunited states awoke to the railroad age; a glorious, golden period, when many master minds sang their verses in humming wheels.

In solving the problems of transportation, forcing the Juggernaut to harness, and fastening to the iron deity an imposing train of full-laden cars, the development and sturdy growth of all sections of the land began. The American seer, looking at Progress, discovered it consisted of the activity of to-day, combined with the assurance of to-morrow. Of activity there could be no lack; eye, hand, and brain had ever been ready. Of assurance, or faith, that inspiring handmaiden of industry, no one

was heard to lament her absence. Clear-headed, a robust nymph, she urged her servitors to new endeavors.

"Till! till! Dig! dig!" she said, and the race of men, like ants, obeyed her behests. Everywhere the obedient monsters of burden puffed and whistled, and proudly whisked behind them their long and flowing appendages.

Being literally a golden age—not in the Arcadian sense of "love in idleness," the sound of pipes, and the bleating or be-ribboned lambs—it was necessarily a period of combinations and consolidation. But where there are builders, wreckers, also, are found. The gentle art of destroying values became a nice game of chance; whenever the horn of plenty grew too full the temptation to pillage was irresistible. Thus roads were created, wrecked, and re-created—a merry hazard! The lambs were not be-ribboned, as in the golden days of yore. In this fortuitous period Chloe would not have recognized her pretty pets, for nature's soft adornment was ruthlessly shorn from them, and man turned them over to Providence to temper the wind to their plight.

Richard Strong belonged uncompromisingly to the builders; he had rather discouraged than encouraged undue inflation; he preferred an equitable, not an over-issue, of bonds, and assumed obligations based upon the actual earning powers of the properties. But he could

not control the coterie of temerarious spirits who tempted fortune and the public in a blind bargain with spectacular changes. In fact, he paid little attention to the sportive operations of the various cliques, unless the onslaught became too fierce, and actual disaster was feared, when of necessity he became a participant in the game.

Upon their arrival at New York after another dusty trip on the commodore's famous Hudson River railroad, Mr. and Mrs. Strong repaired to the Fifth Avenue Hotel. That hostelry was then the scene of all up-town speculations; its corridors as much a part of Wall Street as the convenient steps of the Subtreasury. At the corner of Fifth Avenue and Twenty-third Street crowds might now be seen, despite the hour, attracted by a blood-red transparency, announcing a petroleum board that evening, and the opportunities of dealing in railway and petroleum stocks in gold. Richard Strong, from the carriage, noted the unwonted activity, and surmised that some of his own properties were not the least among those being traded in on the curb at that unhalloved time for business. Elinor, however, glanced indifferently at the spectacle. What was there in railroads or oil to warrant that feverish earnestness? The world to her appeared all topsyturvy.

At the hotel Mr. and Mrs. Rossiter and Tim Taplin were in waiting.

"My dear! What a disappointment!" exclaimed Mrs. Rossiter, clasping the girl in her arms. "To be called back from your honeymoon! It must have been important business, Mr. Strong."

"It was, Madam," replied that gentleman. "And that same business makes it necessary for me to go out now."

Whereupon, leaving his wife to make such explanations as she saw fit, Mr. Strong took his departure.

"Now," he said to Tim Taplin as the vehicle in which they found themselves shortly afterward sped down Broadway at a brisk pace, "what is it all about?"

"I don't know what the text is," answered the other, "but Uncle Sam'l got it out of the Bible."

And he briefly related the episode at the church and the circumstances growing out of it. All day the Street had been black with dark imaginings and forebodings affecting the general list of securities; the unfavorable state of the crops, manufacturing and trade; the insufficient earnings of transportation companies; the unsatisfactory course of imports and exports; the disappointing movements of the precious metals, and the cheerless conditions of the London and the continental markets.

Amid a turbid atmosphere of sophistry, speciousness and mystification, one special stock had been selected for bombardment and storming—the D. B. and C. Railroad,

a property recently acquired and now controlled and managed by Richard Strong. That person listened grimly to the alleged head and front of his offending. The cash value of his new railroad, said detraction, was less than twenty-five per cent. of the stocks and bonds issued against the property; the first mortgage more than doubled the legitimate cost of building, and the construction company, of which Richard Strong was president, had "milked" the property of all its profits, leaving the army of robbed stock-holders to face a disastrous future.

"Is that all?" quietly asked the listener, when Tim finally paused.

"That's all," said the other, sadly. "Except considerable liquidation has begun in D. B. and C."

"Liquidation!" returned Richard Strong. "A short interest, you mean."

"Yes, sir. But here we are, sir. You wait a moment, Mr. Strong, and I'll light up the hall and the offices. Then you won't stumble, sir."

"Never mind the light in the hall. I know my way. You remain here," he continued to the driver, as the man, dismounting, swung open the door of the carriage. And following Tim Taplin through the doorway of the office building Richard Strong disappeared into the dark corridor beyond.

The man on the box waited; then he climbed down

again and waited. Finally, after what seemed an interminable period, he lighted a cigar and moved impatiently to and fro. He had looked for a short fare and chanced upon a long one. He yawned and smoked, and glanced from time to time at the light in a window. The clock in the distant steeple struck two.

"I guess I'll have time to drop around the corner for a quick bite," thought the man, and suited the action to the word, leaving the horses standing with downcast heads, as a guaranty of good faith and his near presence in the neighborhood.

Meanwhile, unmindful of the hour, Richard Strong had been working with characteristic concentration. Letters, instructions, orders, were tersely dictated. Tim, an automaton of precision, wrote and wrote, wondering what his sister would think of his long absence, whether she would attribute it to an unwonted outbreak of involuntary jollification, the tempting allurements of a music hall, or some dire catastrophe perpetrated by daring footpads, when—

"That will do," said Mr. Strong, rising. He reached for his hat and cane. "Deliver the instructions to the brokers personally," he added, "and be sure and be down early."

"Couldn't be down much earlier, sir," said Taplin.

"It's a long ways to where I live, and so"—glancing at the lounge—"I might as well stay here. Then I'll be sure not to oversleep myself—that is, if you will be so good as to send the driver with this note to my sister, telling her where I am. He can just push it under the front door, if you please, sir!"

"Very well," said Mr. Strong, taking the note; "good night." He strode down stairs, out into the hall, and thence to the street.

The thoroughfare was deserted; as still and quiet and isolated from throbbing humanity as if it were no longer the great artery of finance—the mart, the exchange, the bourse of the New World—but had relapsed to that period when a tangle of underbrush marked its course and a palisade of posts and rails was its most conspicuous feature. Tim's employer promptly refused to tarry for the master of the hack as that worthy had tarried for him, and turning he quickly walked down the street. As he proceeded, however, his pace involuntarily lagged. Now that the business of the night was over and the absorbing zest of the hour had passed, a heaviness of spirit assailed him.

For the first time in all his experience, the unreality of the struggle called life, smote him. What did it all mean? Whence did it tend? He would have sworn to positiveness of a seeming fact yesterday; to-day it was non-existent. It had been unsubstantial; the figment of

a dream! He, Richard Strong, a dreamer! Looking up, from that narrow street the stars now seemed to him very far! Were they chimerical, too? He dropped his head toward the ground; he listened to his echoing footsteps—as if his shadow were walking on the other side of the street! His shadow; his second-self? Would it go tramping along by his side for ever; reminding him that he, too, was but a phantom briefly passing through some mysterious intermedium, a transitional strife?

He was aroused by the sound of a vehicle rapidly approaching from behind. Urged by the whip of the driver the equipage drew quickly near, when the horses were pulled up with no gentle hand, and the carriage stopped in front of Richard Strong just as he was turning into Broadway.

“Sorry, sir,” began the driver, “but I thought I’d have time just to step—”

“Never mind,” returned Mr. Strong, interrupting this explanation, as he entered the hack. “Drive back to the hotel!”

Lower Broadway, that erstwhile bustling part of the stirring thoroughfare, was as abandoned as Wall Street had been, but along the upper regions of that highway signs of life and activity were still not wanting. The city was socially in a transitional condition; the provincial chrysalis had slowly worked out of its tough, fibrous cocoon, and the cosmopolitan butterfly had begun to

spread its wings. Bachelors now began to live Paris-fashion, renting furnished rooms and eating at the restaurants. Bohemia flourished; in the small hours the Circean cup went round; conviviality and good fellowship threw its roseate hues over deep potations.

The occupant of the carriage, soothed by the sound of the wheels and sheer weariness, had sunk into a half-slumber on the cushions, and drove by the chosen resorts of the elect, oblivious of the strains of music wafted from within, of the spectacle of a bibulous Damon and Pythias holding amicable converse beneath a flickering street lamp. He was recalled to himself by the abrupt stopping of the vehicle and the voice of the driver: "All right, sir! Here you are!"

Richard Strong paid the man, sought his rooms, and soon the half-slumber was succeeded by that brief oblivion with which sleep temporizes with care.

The next morning, returning from the breakfast-room to his apartments after a hurried and scanty repast, during which he had but hastily glanced over the news columns of Mr. Greeley's paper, and even ignored that great man's editorial for the day, he encountered his wife. Though she held herself proudly, her manner was constrained; when he spoke to her her color deepened.

"We shall be obliged to stay here a few days until the house is ready," he said in a matter-of-fact tone. "The decorators had not planned upon our being back so

soon." And then as he turned to leave—"I shall not be back to the hotel until night," he added.

After he had gone, Elinor, still with heightened color, made a pretense of adjusting a flower in her hair. For a few moments she went on with her task, but the flower apparently did not suit her and she ended by tossing it aside. Then she went to the window and stood there tapping the floor with her foot. She saw Richard Strong emerge from the hotel, cross the walk and pavement and enter a street-car without looking back. She followed the car with her glance as it joined the down-flowing stream of vehicles, until an intervening building hid it from sight. Even when it had disappeared, she continued to look upon that busy world from that busy corner.

At nine o'clock Richard Strong was in sight of his office. As he walked along the street upon which the building stood, sundry signs of a coming storm loomed on the horizon of the narrow way. Several Hebrews from the wholesale clothing district had wandered out of the beaten path of commerce and found themselves on the enticing thoroughfare of speculation. They appeared nervous, anxious, keen-scented. The anticipation of quick profits that would discount all ordinary buying and selling of merchandise shone from their features.

A number of the Christian gentry who emulated their Israelitish brethren were also there; men who on other days quietly figured their interest, simple and compound,

discreetly foreclosed their mortgages, and eschewed practices demoralizing to peace of mind and conscience. Shambling along, just in front of Richard Strong, was a thin man, with a parchment-like skin and the complexion of an anchorite. "Occasional Jonas," he was called; a person who was very seldom seen upon the Street, and then only when the frowns of fortune laid bane and blight upon business. A hunter of values, with beady eyes, he had come to be regarded as a forerunner of disaster; a ghoul that walked among the wounded on the financial battle-field, alert for spoils and booty. Mr. Strong smiled grimly.

"Good morning, Jonas," he said, overtaking him. "Looking around for a little plunder?"

The man started. "No," he said slowly. "I'm getting too old for that. I just came down for—for—"

"A matter of habit!" interrupted the other, regarding him gloomily from beneath his heavy brows. "Get all you can, Jonas."

And Richard Strong strode on. The old man looked after him; the beady eyes shone; the thin mouth closed, then Occasional Jonas turned and shambled the other way. In front of the church he hesitated, again looked back, but finally went on up-town.

"The lion is unchained," he quoted to himself and chuckled.

CHAPTER X

A FLUTTER IN VALUES

Could the picture of Jacob Little above Richard Strong's desk have descended from its frame that morning and stridden forth in the flesh, undoubtedly that speculator of the Street would have rubbed his thin hands in delight. As it was, his eyes appeared to glow in portraiture and his features to sharpen with zest. "Here's excitement! here's life!" the little man seemed to say, as if he were not—alas!—only an inky semblance of a mortal, but the real Jacob who could "paper his office with notes he had forgiven the members of the Board."

And truly the scene at the Stock Exchange was inspiring enough to draw to the temple of finance all Tennie Claflin's band of ghostly, wagering veterans, the spirits of those first Wall Street gamesters who met and organized beneath the shadow of the buttonwood tree; or the venturesome "long-or-short" gentlemen of the Board who held forth betimes in the offices of the old *Courier* and *Journal*! The great money temple, itself, had not

long been built, and represented the evolution of the ancient Tontine Coffee-house, the bourse of the early fathers.

Like Solomon's temple, the foundations were on the rock. It also had several entrances, after the fashion of that ancient proud edifice, but no Gate Beautiful. A soft religious light, however, pervaded its interior. Nor was the odor of incense wanting; a ventilating apparatus took the place of swinging censers and supplied pure air and perfumes for the devotees. There stood not one altar, but many, each of which served a specific purpose and was surrounded by certain of the elect.

The edifice was crowded. From Broad, New and Wall Streets the people came and went, swarming in and out the main and back entrances, and thronging about the Wall Street door. Upon the floor of the Temple, no place had been arbitrarily fixed for Jews and Gentiles; they brushed against one another, brethren in the ritual of fortune. The service was neither Judaical nor Christian, but partook of a sensational fanaticism, like that of a barbaric religious feast of old. Only these modern worshipers did not cut and hack their faces or breasts, but one another's fortunes.

"I wonder what spring Strong is drinking from now?" laughed one of the devotees after an unusually animated

exhibition about the altar especially set apart for that gentleman's securities.

"It may be a s-s-spring at Saratoga, but it's a d-d-deluge for D. B. and C. at home," said the gentle, scoffing voice of the person addressed.

"Oh, it is, is it?" thought Tim Taplin, who was hurrying by at that moment, all ears and eyes. "What would you say if you knew he was right here in New York?"

And Tim glanced knowingly at the speakers; then wriggled himself out of the multitude. Hubbub and racket followed him; a babel of voices, shrill, clamorous, stentorian! For a moment he stood on the verge of the tumult, and then plunged into the street and the bright sunshine.

As he turned away his ears vibrated to the din, but—such is habit—he soon forgot the discord and riotous spectacle, and, before he reached the office, had begun to hum the latest parody on the Italian opera:

"When other lips and other duns
Their tale of woe shall tell,
Of notes in bank, without the funds,
And cotton hard to sell—

"Hard to sell!" he repeated. "Bless you, everybody is selling to-day!"

It was not much more than a stone's throw to the of-

fice, yet on the way he was stopped twice by the professional tipsters. These gentlemen, in common with the public, were out in unusual numbers; their appearance varied—from the neatly-dressed, sharp-eyed touter to the reduced codger who exploited his advice and expounded his wisdom in some subterranean saloon! All were double-loaded with knowledge; primed from the fountain-head. Some great man had “tipped them the wink” and they were but passing it on.

When they stopped Tim Taplin, they were searching for another mythical wink. Tim represented Richard Strong; he was that gentleman’s wink in proxy. But Taplin waved them imperiously aside; he had certain well-fixed ideas about what was due his own dignity, and believed in holding these eavesdroppers and professional mouthpieces at a safe and reasonable distance. Richard Strong’s chief clerk was a man of importance—sometimes.

The gesture, nevertheless, was sufficient unto itself for the eager newsmongers. They interpreted it in the light of their vivid imaginations and were prepared to breathe what they had learned (?) in mysterious whispers and vague innuendos. From the significant movement of Tim’s arm to the lurid reports that soon were going the round of the circle, represented a flight of fancy calculated to make the most inventive poet or fertile writer of

romances turn green with envy. They had Richard Strong dead and alive; in Saratoga and New York; buying and selling; long and short; short and long—to all of which they found ready and willing listeners!

As Tim presented himself before his employer, that gentleman looked up from his desk and his papers.

"D. B. and C. is three points lower, sir," said the clerk, half-mournfully.

Mr. Strong thought a moment and then handed Tim several slips of paper.

"Caution the brokers to buy very discreetly," he said, "and only at the figures given."

"The worst was at the opening, sir."

"Let the auditors have access to every book,"—offering no response to Mr. Taplin's comment. "All the vouchers; the expense accounts; everything pertaining to the construction company! If there is anything they don't understand in D. B. and C. send them to me."

"They have three men at it now, sir, and"—with a certain clerical pride—"so far, have found all the books and accounts in ship-shape order."

Richard Strong was about to take the public unreservedly into his confidence. He had determined that the report of an auditing firm of unquestioned reliability and standing should constitute his answer to the charges preferred of gross irregularities and pillaging in the af-

fairs of D. B. and C. Meanwhile he made no plea; silence was stronger than a defense not fully fortified with facts and figures.

"The rest of the list holds up?" he asked.

"About where it was, sir," said Tim, as he left the room to carry out the orders he had received.

His employer returned to his work. He was considering with close attention such information as he had obtained of the bank situation and the probable position of that prop of all values—money—when a soft masculine voice, just without, caused him to glance toward the door. The head clerk, in going out, had left it slightly ajar. Richard Strong arose and moved toward the threshold, intending to close the door. Then he stopped; something in the voice made him pause. Where had he heard it before?

"Mr. Strong has returned home, you say? I must see him at once."

"Is it so very important, sir?" returned one of the clerks, doubtfully.

"Very important, my good man!"

Now the listener remembered and placed the unruffled tones. Straightway consideration of possible bank reserves and losses vanished from his mind.

"Mr. Strong left word—" again began the clerk, in mild expostulation.

"But that would not apply to *me*! I'll walk right in."

And suiting the action to the word, a gentleman in black entered the private office. With his round face wreathed in a smile, he came to a sudden stop upon encountering Richard Strong near the door, but in a moment recovered himself.

"My dear Mr. Strong! This is an unexpected pleasure."

The powerful hand of the other closed mechanically upon the soft one of his caller. Did he grip it half-savagely? The Reverend Doctor Clement winced, but in a moment the smiles returned. The rector of Mrs. Rossiter's church was nothing if not debonair. He did not believe that a Christian should of necessity be a hypochondriac. If he was pacific and palliative in the pulpit, he became blithe and buoyant away from it. His was the *allegresse* of the ecclesiastical essence; with a cheering chirp for the ladies and a playful pat for the men!

"Ah, you men of affairs!" he now said briskly to Richard Strong. "You haven't even time for a honeymoon!" Mr. Strong's face remained impassive. "But day before yesterday you were paying homage before the hymeneal altar, and to-day you are worshiping the Golden Calf. Ha-ha! You see I am talking to you as if you were already one of my parishioners. We hope to claim you soon, however, through your wife, who has long been one

of our members. By the by, what church do you belong to, Mr. Strong?"

"I contribute toward the support of Mr. Beecher's Tabernacle," answered that gentleman, briefly.

The Reverend Doctor Clement coughed. His expression was not exactly one of disparagement or disapproval; it was vague, uncertain, not susceptible of analysis; the attitude of conservatism toward those churches without the exact boundaries of a single creed.

"It is true we are a *small* congregation," he continued, "but a very *cozy* one. However, my call is not pastoral or ministerial, but, I fear, of a mundane nature."

"How can I serve you, sir?" asked the other.

"You are the president of the D. B. and C. railroad, Mr. Strong. I dropped in to learn about you and a little stock that I hold—a very little! In answer to my inquiry when you would return, your clerk informed me you were already here. Under the circumstances, would you advise me to sell, or buy, or, in the vernacular of the Street, 'to stand pat'?" The gaiety of his manner was succeeded by momentary earnestness; a trace of worry or anxiety peeped out of his eyes. "There are some sad rumors going around about it," he said, shaking his head. "Sad rumors!"

"Do you believe them?" asked Richard Strong, bluntly.

The caller colored a little. "It is not for me to believe

or disbelieve," he replied. "You have your own code of—what shall I call it?—ethics, on the Street."

"Then you believe them," said the other,

A look of real distress appeared on the Reverend Mr. Clement's face. "My dear Mr. Strong!" he exclaimed, and placed an expostulatory hand soothingly on his companion's shoulder.

"I do not see how I can help you very much, Doctor Clement," returned Richard Strong, shortly. "If you credit what you hear, the stock is a sale. If all that they say be true, it is not worth the present quotations."

That this answer was not as definite as the caller had hoped for was evident from the expression on his countenance. But Doctor Clement prided himself on being an astute observer of men and motives and gradually the perplexity in his eyes gave way to a gleam of enlightenment.

"Thanks; thanks very much!" said the reverend gentleman, and, pressing the hand of the other warmly once more, he turned to go. At the door his face recovered its liveliness.

"Don't forget," he exclaimed, "we expect Mrs. Strong to draw you into our little circle!"

Richard Strong gazed out of the window when his caller had departed. "He took what I said to mean it

would be better to dispose of his stock," he thought, and his brow grew darker as he looked down the street.

At that moment, it chanced that two men, who were passing on the other side, glanced up of one accord and saw him standing there.

"Thunder!" exclaimed the younger of the two. "Richard Strong has come back!"

The elder man became a trifle more yellow; he was wiping his glasses nervously.

"Are you sure, Jim, that was Strong?"

"Aren't you?" was the reply. "Why, your glasses fell off your nose from the start he gave you. He must have noticed you, too," added Fisk, "for his face wore an expression the reverse of heavenly."

By that time Uncle Sam'l had readjusted his glasses.

"I hadn't looked for him this morning—in fact, to-day—" he began nervously.

"And now he's here you begin to wonder if he will send you where the woodbine twineth!" laughed the other.

Brewster's eyes gleamed with sudden anger and suspicion.

"Are you going to change your coat?" he said, fixing his ferret eyes on his companion.

"Not unless I find myself an ass in a lion's skin," lightly commented the other, as they moved on.

Preoccupied though he was, Richard Strong had, indeed, seen his old enemy, and regarded him steadily for a moment before returning to his desk.

In the interim of waiting for developments on 'Change, he fixed his attention upon other matters: a proposition in mining; the prospectus of an oil company in the early throes of organization. The first he dropped in a waste-paper basket; the other he filed in one of the numerous pigeon-holes of his desk, after which he began opening his neglected mail, sorting out the wheat from the chaff. The latter followed the mining proposition; the former was spread out mechanically and placed at his right hand. Although he had been away only two days, his letters had accumulated until the reading and answering of them became a formidable task. Many were from alarmed bond-holders or people who carried stock; these he placed in a little bundle by themselves, and, reaching for the bell, touched it.

"Answer these letters," he said, when the chief clerk had responded to the summons. "These persons must receive copies of the reports now being made."

Tim silently took the parcel. Still he lingered. Mr. Strong glanced at him sharply.

"There's a young gentleman outside who would like to speak with you, sir," said the clerk, hesitatingly.

An expression of annoyance shone from the other's eyes.

"I told him you were very busy," went on Taplin, hastily, "but he insisted upon my taking in his card, and here it is, sir!"

"Mr. Charles Dalton," read Richard Strong, surveying the bit of pasteboard.

For some time he continued to regard it. Tim folded his arms, a mild intimation that even clerical patience has its limits. What had come over his employer that he should thus ponder over so small a matter? The caller might have been received and dismissed in half the time already consumed in considering whether he should be admitted or not. The clerk shook his head. He had always been a persistent, if not deep, observer of the man he served, and was now convinced something was wrong—something beyond stocks!

"What shall I say to the gentleman?" he finally ventured.

Mr. Strong started, and threw the card, with an impatient gesture, upon the table.

"I can not see him now."

CHAPTER XI

CHARLIE ENDEAVORS TO NEGOTIATE AN IDEA

At noon the commotion subsided somewhat in the money temple. For the moment many of the participants dropped, as it were, the apple of discord and the bone of contention and turned to the real viands of the Astor House or the numerous side-street restaurants. Here quick lunches and slow lunches were served by the colored waiters, and between sips and bites the diners figuratively surveyed their "paper profits"; chimerical clouds of gold and silver floating in an azure dome!

It was but a brief breathing spell; a period when fancy gave to airy nothing a local habitation and a name. The traffickers walked on air, and ate without palpable relish. As in the case of smokers of hashish, the reins of the imagination were loosened, and the chariot of fancy drove headlong through fantastical realms.

"D. B. and C.'ll go down to eighty!"

"Say seventy! You can get it back at seventy!"

"That means quarter of a million and a mansion at Long Branch!"

"I shouldn't be surprised to see it break sixty!"

From the western country *m'chachas*—the cafés of the money-rhapsodists—these dreamers, however, soon wended their way once more to the temple, where Reality, a turbaned sheik that wakes the smokers, would shortly grip them by the shoulder. There the turmoil became louder.

"Eighty-nine!" "Eighty-eight and three-eighths!" "Five thousand at eighty-eight!"

Everywhere Uncle Sam's agents were offering D. B. and C. down. It touched eighty-six, but remained at that quotation for some time; then advanced a quarter of a point. A shoal of "stop-orders" had been gathered in; for a long time prices had been skimming the surface above this tempting bait; a deeper dive—and the minnows were caught! Values afterward soared a bit, and the suspense became greater. Most of the offerings were quietly absorbed by the brokers of Mr. Strong; whenever there seemed evidence of fair buying from other sources, these agents remained inactive, reserving themselves for any possible emergency.

That gentleman, commanding the operation of a majority of the unobtrusive buyers, had eaten lunch at his office sometime after the noon hour. The exciting

moments had slowly slipped by and but a brief interval of suspense remained before the closing.

Meanwhile he drank his coffee and waited. From where he was seated he could see a flood of people issuing from the building that had been a center of interest throughout the day. He set down the cup; then looked at his watch. A rap on the door, and a darky from a near-by restaurant entered, followed by the chief clerk.

"'Scuse me, Mistah Strong! Mah instructions am to brin' back de dishes." With which he began to gather them noisily on a tray. "Done bought five shares dat D. B. and C. on de curb, Mistah Strong!" he added with a grin, shouldering his load and departing. Not many months before he had been in bondage; from slave to speculator represented but one of the sudden transitions of fortune in that momentous period.

"The market is a bit firmer, sir," said Tim, when the dusky operator in small lots had vanished. "I don't know exactly what's caused it—except it is rumored Fisk has broken loose from Brewster."

Richard Strong pondered. Taplin's conclusion about Jim Jubilee did not appear warranted to him at present. But it might happen that the young man would later secretly shake off his allegiance to the older. A maze of conflicting interests would probably become

evident at the first sign of impotence on Brewster's part. As long as he was puissant and held the key to the situation, he could hold his following, but let an inkling get out that his grip was not iron or his fingers were slipping, and Uncle Samuel would be left standing alone in the gap. Such a consummation Richard Strong expected—but how long he should have to wait for it he did not attempt to tell himself.

"By the way, sir, that young gentleman you refused to see this morning has come back," resumed Taplin.

"Mr. Dalton?"

"Yes, sir. When I gave him your message he said he would call around later in the day. He is now waiting outside."

"Show him in!"

And Richard Strong leaned back in his chair. Now that the day was over—that technical "day" of the Street, measured by but a few hours, not by the rising and setting of the sun—he became conscious for the first time of the mental tension he had been laboring under. The gratifying belief that the future would bring further advancement and an equitable readjustment of values did not seem to afford him the satisfaction it should have done.

"How do you do, Mr. Strong?"

With apparently easy assurance Charlie Dalton strode

into the room. He was carefully dressed and his clothes set off well his tall, athletic figure. The tailor whom he patronized could not have found a more fitting model, and apparently that worthy maker of garments was aware of the fact, for the morning coat draped the broad shoulders without a wrinkle, while the light trousers had been sedulously cut to adorn the nice symmetry of the lower limbs. A voluminous flowing tie burst gaily from the upper confines of the waistcoat; a small fob peeped modestly from beneath it. On his finger shone dully an old ring—presumably ancestral! For a moment the two men exchanged glances, and it was the younger who again broke the silence.

“I heard you had returned,” he continued. “I met Mr. Rossiter and he told me all about it!”

Richard Strong did not rise, nor did he shake hands with his visitor,—a reception not in accord with just what Dalton had expected. On the few occasions when they had met before Mr. Strong’s marriage that gentleman’s manner had been cordial almost to friendliness. This present remissness, however, Charlie overlooked under the stress of circumstances so absorbing to this master of finance, and, selecting a chair, dropped into it without the formality of an invitation.

“I suppose Elinor was a good deal cut up,” he went on. “And the Saratoga season just begun!”

The other did not answer. Charlie laid the handle of his cane meditatively against his chin; his eyes were bent on the carpet.

Why had he called? Richard Strong was asking himself. And why—especially—did he not state his business at once? Did Charlie Dalton read the disinclination toward himself in Richard Strong's eyes? At any rate, his own gaze returned that brief scrutiny with a certain propitiatory deference.

"And how is Mrs. Strong?" he asked.

"Very well," answered the elder man, shortly.

He had been wondering at that moment just what connection the Daltons had with the Rossiters. He knew a relationship existed between the two families, but how near he could not say. Both the Rossiters and the Daltons had been prominent in Colonial days and had lived on Wall Street when that thoroughfare had been devoted to fashion and culture. Then, young gentlemen of the name of Dalton, in powdered wigs and black satin small-clothes, had promenaded thereabouts with the Misses Rossiter in brocaded silks, court hoops and the gay hats of the period. Nevertheless, the types of the two families were entirely distinct. They appeared of kin, but not of kind. Mr. Rossiter represented the embodiment of culture and oversensitiveness; young Dalton was made of more virile—or commonplace—clay.

"I am not disturbing you?"

It was Charlie Dalton who was now studying Mr. Strong.

"Disturbing? No!"—looking straight at the young fellow.

"Interrupting, then?"

The other did not reply at once. When he did speak, it was but to answer the question with another.

"What relation," said Mr. Strong, abruptly, "are you to—my wife's family?"

"Elinor and I are third cousins."

Richard Strong drummed on the desk.

"What," he said bluntly, "can I do for you?"

"Nothing," replied Charlie, "unless—" here he hesitated; then added, "unless I can negotiate an idea."

The other stared hard at the young man.

"Why," continued Dalton, half-apologetically and shifting his cane, "it's just a little plan of my own which came to me at the office this morning as I watched on the blackboard D. B. and C. tumbling down. It may seem rather impertinent on my part to bring it to *you*, but I couldn't get it out of my head. So thought I'd come anyhow and if you didn't care to listen—I could go away again."

A grim smile flickered across Mr. Strong's features.

"Well, sir, what is this idea of yours?"

Charlie recovered his assurance and his manner became businesslike.

"Suppose you controlled most of D. B. and C., as no doubt you could, either as cash or contract stock." He glanced quickly at Mr. Strong, but that gentleman's face told him nothing. "Then offer some of it to the bears for cash and buy it back from them on buyers' options. After that—"

And Charlie went on to explain his plan or ruse at length, growing more enthusiastic as he proceeded. It was not only daring, but original and well-conceived. Richard Strong listened, but made no comment until the young man had finished.

"That is all very well," he said, "and might answer, but"—dryly—"unfortunately for your idea, I am accustomed to proceed in my own manner."

A quick flush mantled Charlie's face. "I am sorry to have disturbed you," he said, rising. "Very good of you to listen to me. To tell you the truth, I was not very sanguine about the matter. Good day."

"One moment! You mentioned your idea as negotiable. What did you mean?"

"I meant to sell it—if it was worth anything to you."

"And how much did you expect to realize?"

Mr. Strong's tone was incisive; his eyes probed his visitor. Charlie shrugged his shoulders.

"Beggars can not be choosers," he said.

"Beggars!" repeated Richard Strong.

Involuntarily he surveyed the new boots, the new hat, the new waistcoat.

The flush again sprang to Dalton's cheek. Then his eyes grew cynical.

"I'll tell you frankly, Mr. Strong," he said; "when the family reached me, the old ancestral vine had run to seed. In other words, I came into the world too late. Had enough and a little more to get through college with. Did not know but what there was a lot of lucre until my guardian died. Then I awoke to the sad reality. I think—" he added skeptically—"he had helped himself."

His listener did not evince great interest.

"What did you do then?" he asked.

"The best I could. I always had a hankering for the Street, but soon found I couldn't get the kind of position I wanted. Young men of college training do not seem to be urgently needed for places of importance in this neighborhood. However, I compromised with my dignity and at present"—with an ironical laugh—"I am engaged in the lucrative occupation of 'general utility man,' for Simons, Shields and Company. 'Brokers and Bankers', they call themselves; you can imagine

what they are. But I won't detain you any longer, and—thank you for seeing me.”

He had his hand on the door when—

“I can't use your idea, but I might use *you*,” said the man at the desk.

Dalton turned and looked back. Richard Strong was recalling to his mind at that moment a half-promise given to Mrs. Rossiter before his marriage.

“Oh, Mr. Strong,” that lady had said one evening, “I want you to give Charlie Dalton a chance. He's such a bright young man and comes from one of our best families. He was brought up to expect a competency and now—poor fellow!—finds himself thrown upon his own resources.”

“Poor fellow, indeed!” the other had answered with a smile. “But I will see what can be done, Madam—when we get back!”

“Thank you. I knew you would. I am sure he can be of service to you.”

A half-promise became usually a whole-promise with the man at the desk; he had permitted that enthusiastic lady to infer that he might do something when the bridal trip was over.

“Do you want to try it in the office?” said Mr. Strong.

Charlie started; his eyes gleamed! A sudden vision swept across his mind. Richard Strong was to the other

a genie with the magic lamp. Opportunity, the servitor of the apt, beckoned him with enticing finger. But he did not betray his eagerness; he passed his hand carelessly through his hair.

"What to do?" he said. The recollection of a number of pale-faced people, bending over desks in the outer offices, pen in hand, abruptly tempered his zeal. "Write?"

"No."

"All right," replied the young man. "When do you want me, Mr. Strong?"

"I'll let you know. Good day."

"Good day!" And Charlie Dalton bowed himself out of the room.

Not without secret elation he swung around the corner of Wall Street into the main thoroughfare. As he had said, he had scarcely expected Mr. Strong to make use of his idea; he had gone to him for really another purpose. He wanted to know Mr. Strong better and—what was more important—wanted that gentleman to know him. And now Charlie found himself in a fair way indeed to become better acquainted with the financier—a consummation devoutly to be wished for by a young man who had yet to chain the god, Success, to his car. Truly his visit had been productive of better results than he had anticipated.

He did not know just where he was going now, but as he wandered on, past, present and future blended in his mind in fortuitious fashion. He saw himself as he had been at college, when, secure in the belief that he was master of a handsome fortune, he had recklessly indulged every caprice, every folly. He saw himself now, sobered by the abrupt revelation of his poverty—his precipitancy tempered with cool calculation. He had not been brought up to figure, but confronted by grim necessity, the spirit of old Uncle Wilhelm—a rapacious ancestor and one of the members of the ancient Exchange organized beneath the spreading boughs—looked out of his eyes. They were not disagreeable, hard, squinting eyes like those of the venal and tight-fisted little gentleman who had frowned in oils upon succeeding generations of Daltons, but attractive, deep blue, full of contradictions and confidence.

At the corner of Bleeker Street Charlie almost ran into a young man, of short figure, wearing a white top hat and check suit. Although immaculate, this person was not handsome; his high hat seemed but to emphasize his lack of height and his side whiskers looked the more aggressive in the bright sunshine. At variance with this latter superficial appearance of combativeness, however, his eyes beamed kindly upon Dalton and upon the world in general.

"Well, Charlie, how goes it?" he asked.

Dalton placed one hand on the short man's shoulder, and the other across his own breast.

"There is a tide in the affairs of men," he began.

"You don't say so?" cried the delighted Tom Marks. "But what—"

"And we must take the current when it serves"—Tom—descending abruptly into prose—"come along and I'll tell you about it."

Mr. Marks slipped his arm through Charlie's, and, as they walked on, listened at first with manifest interest, then with unfeigned satisfaction.

"I don't wonder your idea caught his fancy!" he exclaimed admiringly when the other had finished. "By Jove, I don't believe any one else would have thought of that."

Dalton made an expostulatory gesture. Ever since a certain memorable occasion at college when he had pulled the hapless Tom out of the river, he found he had snatched from the depths a "friend who sticketh closer than a brother." But Charlie was not one to be idly deceived by his satellite's unqualified approval.

"Nonsense, Tom!" he said doubtfully. "I'm not at all sure it was the idea. To tell you the truth, I don't know just what did influence him."

CHAPTER XII

MR. ROSSITER VISITS THE STREET

The battery, once the Belgravia of the older city, had long since been shorn of its glory; the spot where the courtly Lafayette had been received was now a landing-place for immigrants and a rendezvous for the runners and light-fingered gentry from the Five Points, the St. Giles' of New York. Those ladies, whose grandmothers had promenaded the Battery with the fashion and élite of the day, now solaced themselves with a spin in the park or an afternoon saunter on the Mall.

The city nesting on the water's edge could not be confined by old landmarks. The trend of fashion on Manhattan Island had been steadily up-town, until Fifth Avenue, as far as Fifty-ninth Street, had become an unbroken line of brown stone. From this highly respectable thoroughfare of the growing metropolis, the monotonous-looking fronts overflowed upon Madison and Lexington Avenues, Fourteenth, Twenty-third and

Thirty-fourth Streets, and Madison, Stuyvesant, and Gramercy Squares.

If a person could be judged by his house, as a mollusk may be classified by its shell, the observer of this portion of the newer New York would have affirmed it was populated by a serious, sedate people, every individual just like his neighbor. That this inference is unwarranted, the witty and satirical poets of the day vehemently assert, for the press was rife with doggerels belaboring *Vanity Fair* and the prevailing modes. Many a quatrain against the pretensions of wealth brought the bard his next meal, while a bucolic on high life paid for a merry evening at Pfaff's and a pipe and beer in kindred Bohemian company.

In this gay Manhattan town, near a small private park of green, surrounded by the public highway, stood a corner house, larger than its neighbors, and not without a certain air of stateliness and grandeur. This spacious home Richard Strong had purchased for his bride, and thither they moved about a month after their return from Saratoga.

Here no sound more confusing than the gentle tinkling of the dustman's bells, wending his way slowly with his cart, or the occasional dash of an intrusive vehicle, disturbed the tranquil existence of the dwellers. And even the dustman, begrimed and unshaven like a

prophet of old, carried with him his lesson on the vanity of worldly things and outward show.

“Rags! rags!
Bring out your bags!”

sounded the jingling bells. And then:

“Iron turns to rust
And satin to dust!”

admonished the jangling string above the cart, with its load of litter and leavings.

But the month had wrought more changes for Richard Strong than the mere change of abode. After the full and unreserved publication of all the facts pertaining to D. B. and C. that property had again begun to soar until it had passed any previous mark recorded on the Exchange.

Uncle Samuel had stood desperately at his post in the vain endeavor to hold it. His aids and assistants, however, had hastened precipitously to cover, and, by the irony of that bitter warfare that arrays friend against friend, or turns an ally into a foeman, the purchases they made consisted of the offerings of their erstwhile leader himself, who alone, ignorant of this wholesale desertion, continued to obey but one mad prompting—to sell!—sell!

This instinct of self-preservation on the part of his following and the consequent general scurrying had but

hastened the inevitable climax. Uncle Samuel's profits became losses; his full pockets, empty ones. He looked around for his friends and lo, he found that "prosperity is no just scale, but adversity is the only balance by which to weigh friends."

Moreover—and this was the bitterest after-consideration—the man he had sought to injure he had only greatly enriched. Richard Strong's earnings during that period of recovery were estimated as not inconsiderable even for one of his means. To protect himself he had bought stock "all the way down," and, when values had "struck bottom," he had personally absorbed nearly the entire offerings. Then the public, a mighty reserve force, had stepped in; the upward movement had resembled the downward tendency—rapid, almost unstemmed—and Mr. Strong's paper profits became real ones. His original holdings of the various stocks and bonds he still retained; the extra certificates—or their equivalent—he turned over to the public and the profession. After the flurry was over, he again went the even tenor of his way. To him Wall Street was not merely a sensational stock-jobbing thoroughfare, but a street where new enterprises, reaching over the land, were born, fathered and legitimately financed.

Exactly how well he had fared in the struggle no one knew from him; but Mrs. Rossiter plumed her

feathers ostentatiously. Mr. Rossiter, however, looked reflective; he could not entirely reconcile his daughter's manner to that unalloyed felicity that Mrs. Rossiter told herself and her friends was Elinor's marriage-portion. At times he fancied he detected grave shadows in her eyes, and she seemed somehow different, and colder, more statuesque than consistent with Mr. Rossiter's old-fashioned notions of the conventionally happy bride. Once he had even ventured to say when they were alone together:

"You are—ahem!—perfectly contented, Elinor dear, in your—ahem!—your new life?"

At first, his abrupt question had startled her; she had gazed at him suddenly with wide-open eyes; then, before his look of perplexity, or vague misgiving, a smile half-affectionate, half-reassuring, had crossed her face.

"Contented? Why shouldn't I be, papa?"

And Mr. Rossiter's doubts for the time had vanished.

"Of course," he had echoed, patting her brown head which bent as readily as of old to his caress. "Why shouldn't you be!"

But although his suspicions had been lulled to rest, Mr. Rossiter felt that he could not entirely understand Mr. Strong. That man of affairs had always treated him with unvarying courtesy, but a difference in their tastes and methods of thinking precluded other than a formal

intimacy. Mr. Rossiter's mind ran to Rossini; to anecdotes of painters, ancient and modern, and to his own early days in Paris before Napoleon III had mounted the throne, or the Crimean War had shaken Europe. He understood very well all about Continental politics, but knew little—and cared less—about what was going on at home. He had a smattering of French, Italian and Spanish; Mr. Strong spoke only English—and very little of that!

Therefore Mr. Rossiter was surprised one day to receive a letter from Mr. Strong, asking him to call at his office the next morning, if convenient, at a certain hour. A request from a man like Richard Strong seemed a command, even to Mr. Rossiter, accustomed to obeying only the wavering behests of his own inclination; and accordingly the following day, with some curiosity and wonderment, he set out for the financier's place of business.

The Rossiters, like many an old family of that day, still lived well down-town, and, as the distance was not great to his destination and the weather fine, Mr. Rossiter decided to walk. Stopping at a florist's he purchased a spray of jasmine which he set jauntily upon the lapel of his coat and strode blithely on.

The streets were thronged and his interest was unflagging, as he wended his way toward the money-center

of the town, casually conscious of the contents of the gay shop-windows—the strings of amber necklaces, much affected by the ladies that season; the divers-colored displays of broad sash ribbons; the floral coiffures, depending in long garlands of red roses over the inanimate shoulders of the wax-figure models from Paris!

In his relish for these decorative trifles, however, Mr. Rossiter did not forget the people that wore them. Flower-girls, toy-sellers blowing whistles, and dog and bird fanciers, he passed by unnoticed, but the toilets of the ladies drew from him many an amused, if not appreciative glance—especially those figures in the fullest glory of the “Grecian bend”!

Here and there, his gaze was attracted by a passing celebrity, local or otherwise; A. T. Stewart, small, shrewd, keen-eyed; Thurlow Weed, tall, thin, shambling; Lydia Thompson, rosy, frowsy, English! That famous burlesque queen was then performing at Wood’s Museum and Metropolitan Theater, and whenever she went out for a walk, her progress through the streets in high heels and hoops invariably occasioned even more comment than the appearance on the Rialto of the inimitable Artemus Ward himself.

“Lydia Thompson, indeed!” thought Mr. Rossiter, shaking his head disapprovingly.

In the old days—ah, then it was different! Then

artists *were* artists! People did not run after burlesque, and large London ladies with small voices! True, there had been dancing, but—such dancing!

La Sylphide, and *Jalleo de Xeres*, tripped by the divine Fanny! And the operas!—with what wealth of vocal ornamentation had they been interpreted!

Thus ruminating, he finally reached the street that possessed, for him, so little interest; that narrow way, where were no shop-windows; where women in buzzing throngs were wanting, and, in their stead, men, pale-faced or eager-eyed, were bustling about as if looking for something. What? Nothing Mr. Rossiter had ever been very much interested in—although something he felt the need of now.

His step grew more staid, his expression pensive; the very atmosphere impressed him. He seemed as a stranger among these people. Yet he knew many of them by sight. Yonder black-bearded little man who was hurrying as if to catch a train was among the first of the trust-makers; his business, to buy two or more bad railroads, make them one good (?) railroad; issue bonds and stock and then sell out to the public. Mr. Rossiter had only an indistinct comprehension of the process, but he had always wondered why the public bought. He knew they did; that they never failed to oblige the dark little gentleman, and that when the property became bank-

rupt, he favored them, and took it back at his own figures. Then after a reasonable interval—

“How do you do, Mr. Rossiter?”

It was Mr. Strong himself who thus accosted him at the entrance of the building where his offices were located. Mr. Rossiter looked up quickly, extending his thin white hand with easy cordiality.

“I received your note, Mr. Strong, and—”

“The business I wished to speak to you about won’t take but a moment,” interrupted the other. “I am obliged to leave the office for a time, and, if you do not mind, I will tell you about it here. That will save your time and mine.”

Mr. Rossiter might have replied that time was of no consequence to him; that he had never been a slave to it, and that there was no urgent need for precipitancy on his part at the present moment. But the other’s energetic manner became contagious, and he replied more briskly than his wont:

“Quite true! What can I do for you?”

A ghost of a smile flickered across Mr. Strong’s countenance.

“Some time ago you spoke to me about some southern bonds you had purchased for Mrs. Rossiter,” he said.

The liveliness faded from the elder man’s face. He had avoided of late thinking about that unpleasant topic

as much as possible; not that he had succeeded entirely in this resolution to set a disagreeable matter behind him. On the contrary, there were moments when it forced itself upon his attention; moments when he weakly peered into the future and wondered how long things could go on as they were!

"Yes," he assented hesitatingly, "I believe I did mention that little matter to you."

"What will you sell them for?" continued the other, bluntly.

Mr. Rossiter gave a start of genuine surprise. He doubted if he had heard aright. Sell them!

"But," he blurted out eagerly, "they are not worth anything!"

"I am my own judge of that," answered Mr. Strong, dryly. "There exists a chance that a state, like an individual, may have its moments of compunction; may repent its action in repudiating its obligations."

The other listened mechanically. He remembered the little hope that had been thrown out to him regarding such a contingency—a recent discouraging conversation at his club with the president of one of the largest banks.

"I don't believe it!" he exclaimed warmly.

Mr. Strong smiled; he even placed his great hand on the frail old gentleman's shoulder.

"You are a poor salesman of your wares!" he said not

unkindly. "But I don't ask you to believe it. I'm willing to take the chance—if you'll take the chance and sell for—fifty cents on the dollar."

Mr. Rossiter turned red; his heart gave a sudden throb of delight. To recover half of that disastrous investment! It was beyond his wildest dreams! Perhaps it would silence Mrs. Rossiter's reproaches; perhaps—

"Of course," went on the measured voice of Richard Strong, "in the event of the state's experiencing the prickings of conscience, you would lose half the original investment."

"I'd rather be sure of half than take such remote chances on the whole," cried the old gentleman, eagerly. "I accept your offer, and with thanks—that is, if you really think"—he could not help adding, half-guiltily—"there is a prospect of the bonds being paid some day?"

His listener apparently did not hear this implied question, or, if he heard, chose not to answer. "Bring them around any time," he said, "and I'll give you a check for them."

"I can run over to the trust company and get them now," said the other.

On his way to the trust company Mr. Rossiter seemed walking on air. The street of little interest became a thoroughfare of good cheer and exhilaration. He smiled on the solid-looking fronts and uninviting entrances. In

the vault of the trust company, which he presently entered, he regarded the once despised bonds with glances of new affection.

"After all, it wasn't such a bad investment," he said to himself. And in the corridor, where he a moment later encountered a grave-looking gentleman—"I've sold them, Mr. Brownson!" he exclaimed. "Those southern state bonds you remember advising me were of no value whatever!"

The grave-looking gentleman stared at him.

"Sold them!" he repeated incredulously. "You are joking!"

"Not a bit of it!" cried Mr. Rossiter. "And to a man who knows what such things are worth!"

"Bless my soul!" remarked the grave-looking gentleman, as the other departed with the bonds safely buttoned up in a pocket of his coat. "What can it mean? Who can want them? I should have thought I could as easily sell Confederate money."

CHAPTER XIII

A DAY FOR REFLECTION

If Mr. Rossiter had apprehended that the ties that bound his daughter to him would be weakened under the new conditions of her life, he was doomed to agreeable disappointment. On the contrary, the bond between them seemed to become stronger, and, at this period, they were often seen together. The social season in town had long since waned, and had been succeeded by nature's festal season. The blossoms of spring had become the full-perfumed flowers of early summer; they bloomed in park and garden and threw their redolence, as far as might be, out over the dusty city. The air still retained a freshness, but the crimson sun, sinking every night in a blaze of glory, gave promise of sultry days to come.

Calling, on the morning after his visit to Wall Street, at his daughter's home, Mr. Rossiter was shown into the great drawing-room. While waiting for Elinor to appear, he critically examined the pictures with which the walls were adorned. From the painted canvases he

passed on to his own reflection, as depicted in the pier glass which ran from floor to ceiling. As he stood, a fine aristocratic figure, casually surveying himself, his daughter entered.

Pausing at the threshold to draw on her gloves, she could not but notice the expression of satisfaction on his thin features. He was half-smiling while adjusting his white mustache, as if his ruminations were far from an unpleasing character.

"Good morning, papa!"—and she stood, a tall form in blue by his side.

"Good morning, my dear! I see you are ready for a walk."

Still holding her hand, he surveyed her.

"How well you are looking!"

"And you," she laughed quickly, though with some constraint, "I never saw you looking younger, or in better spirits!"

"To tell you the truth, I never felt better!" he answered. "A little business matter, my dear, that has terminated—well, rather better than we thought! But I will tell you about it as we go along."

"Suppose we go into the park, and you can tell me about it there," she said almost gaily.

Mr. Rossiter assented, and in a few moments they descended together the formidable array of steps leading

into the street. Within the little garden, the distant rumbling of the busy thoroughfare sounded like the monotonous breaking of the surf, its pulsations steady, deep, apparently never-ending.

"Well, papa?"

She was bending over a flowering bush and he with well-pleased eyes had been watching her, but at her words he started.

"Bless me, I had nearly forgotten!"

Elinor looked up.

"Confess," she said, as they strolled down the path, "you were thinking of some favorite verses?"

"As to that," he answered, "one never gets too old for poetry."

"Some never care for it," she returned thoughtfully.

"Never care for it!" he expostulated. "What heresy!"—and proceeded to tell her of the message he had received from Richard Strong, the visit to Wall Street, and the result of their interview.

She listened attentively, but said nothing; only looked at him earnestly and appeared to be thinking deeply.

"I don't think much of the bonds myself for a venture," continued Mr. Rossiter, cheerily, "but I notice that in the *Journal of Commerce* several firms are bidding fifty for them to-day."

"Is that—what you sold them for?"

"Yes; Mr. Strong undoubtedly bought them for a speculation. Well, I hope they will go higher! Goodness knows, *I* was glad enough to get them off my hands at any price!"

"Speculation?" Elinor felt sure Richard Strong was opposed to all that the word implied. What then had moved him to buy this questionable southern paper? She pursed her brow; she wanted time to think; here it seemed impossible; perhaps out on the noisy streets—

"Of course," she said hastily, "in a matter like this Mr. Strong probably considered both sides carefully. But our walk, papa—we must not miss that!"

He swung his cane lightly. "No, indeed!" he assented, following her down the path.

So many people were out and the thoroughfares appeared so animated, Mr. Rossiter did not observe his daughter's subsequent preoccupation. Moreover, she unconsciously walked a little faster than usual, and the old gentleman, in adapting his step to hers, found the brisk exercise not entirely conducive to conversation. Accordingly, he contented himself with bowing here and there, with occasional comments on the people they met.

To these and other passing remarks she answered mechanically. She remembered she had once, in her solicitude for her father, referred to the bonds in a seemingly careless manner to Mr. Strong and that his reply had

been non-committal. He did not know exactly what they were worth or whether they could be sold.

As she reviewed this incident, suddenly her face became tinted with color; her heart beat a little faster. She felt both humiliated and annoyed.

But this feeling soon passed. Her father had said several firms were bidding on the bonds to-day. That would seem to indicate a radical change of sentiment toward them. It did not occur to Elinor that this brief revival of interest might be coincident with the report that Richard Strong had bought these securities, and that certain people were willing to follow blindly in his footsteps, attaching some deep significance and secret source of information to his action. Yet even while thus endeavoring to reassure her pride, she also felt intuitively that he had not been influenced by selfish motives. He had undoubtedly acted with Mr. Rossiter's welfare in view; conscientiously—not—

“My dear!”

She turned; Mr. Rossiter's hand touched her arm; his face wore a whimsical expression.

“My dear,” he repeated; “I'm afraid I—am growing old!”

“Oh,” she said, with sudden compunction. And added after a moment: “Papa, promise me you won't have any more business dealings with Mr. Strong.”

He regarded her in a puzzled manner, then laughed easily.

"I don't think there is much likelihood of my becoming involved in many business transactions. My affairs now are very simple and I won't trouble Mr. Strong about them. I am not sorry I mentioned the bonds, though. His confidence in them certainly removed a great worry from my mind—a worry that has been causing me much care and anxiety of late."

She looked at the slight debonair figure.

"You?" she said with the playful accent of incredulity she used to bestow upon him.

"If I hadn't sold those bonds—" He paused. "Certainly it was most opportune for your mother and myself."

Her eyes clouded.

"Which reminds me," he went on suddenly, "that I have an engagement at Curet's to meet your mother."

"Then we had better go back," she said quietly.

Upon reaching the door of her house, he hesitated and regarded her almost questioningly. She seemed more subdued than when they had set out together; again, he vaguely wondered if all were as well with her as he had fondly imagined. But she returned his glance reassuringly and he forgot his incertitude as he moved away.

Elinor, standing a moment on the steps, heard the

postman's voice, and taking the letters he handed her, reëntered the house. Sorting out the missives—some for Mr. Strong, a few for herself—she slowly mounted the broad staircase to her own sitting-room. She seated herself at her desk and glanced at the messages. One of these—which bore on the envelope the picture of a mammoth hotel—she opened. It was from Posie Stanton and postmarked Newport.

“My darling”—Posie was nothing, if not extravagant in her mode of expression—“all the world is here—that is, the *feminine* part of it! Man, ‘the crowning wonder of creation,’ *alone* is absent. Still there’s *no time* for re-pining! We dress and undress and dress again. The bathing costumes are as *ridiculous* as ever, and *mine* makes me look like an inflated balloon. You can imagine, having that effect on poor little *me*, what such a dress looks like when it *adorns* middle-aged embonpoint—”

The letter dropped from Elinor’s hand; at that moment even Posie’s vivacious style palled upon her. She arose; took off her hat and laid it on the bed; picked it up again and gazed at it contemplatively. Then, sinking into a chair near the window, she robbed the offending bit of millinery of a flower. The result pleased her no better; the light fingers ceased to desecrate the modish

creation of Madame Camille. Once more she turned to Posie's missive:

"Of course we have seen in the papers *all* about Mr. Strong, and D. B. and C. Papa says he is grand—the highest type of the real couldn't-fail-if-he-wanted-to American—or something like that—"

This time Elinor resolutely perused the missive to the end, italics and all, even its three postscripts scribbled sidewise on the various pages. Then she pushed back her chair.

The day promised to be a long one, especially as she felt a disinclination for the usual attractions of the outer world. She thought of reading, but books, lately, had seemed inadequate to her needs. Passively she watched the sunlight creeping—creeping, so slowly—along the floor.

How quiet the house was! How quiet and large and—almost tenantless, it seemed! The upper hall, too, looked very dark, as she now stole along it, pausing before Richard Strong's private study. The door was ajar and she entered, placing the letters that were addressed to him on the mantel.

The room was fair-sized yet almost devoid of ornamentation. Upon a great desk were many papers, a lamp, an ash-tray and a box of cigars. The papers she glanced at without disturbing their arrangement. They

were full of technicalities and legal phrases she did not understand. The ash-tray then absorbed her attention; it had not yet been cleaned and she counted the cigars he had smoked the night before. He had once told her it was not his practice as a rule to consider business during certain hours for rest in the evening. She did not believe he ever allowed himself any relaxation of late.

A small case contained a number of books. She had never looked to see what they were, but she did now and discovered that, for the most part, the volumes consisted of government and state reports; legislative manuals; documents pertaining to railroad and mining commissions, and kindred literature. Among that grim, statistical company, with their dusty backs and funereal bindings, not a single volume of fiction or verse had crept in to alleviate the severe usefulness of those uninviting shelves.

Upon the case stood a small, but perfect, model of a locomotive which she regarded contemplatively. It was made of silver and gold and a tiny plate, beneath the miniature headlight, said something about its being a presentation from some friendly-disposed fellow directors.

Affixed to the standard upon which it rested was a stanza of the poem by Fitz-James O'Brien, on the real, live monster this dainty toy was a tiny copy of.

That Richard Strong treasured the model and the

sentiment it represented, was evident from the conspicuous place it occupied. So, she told herself, he *did* see poetry in certain phases of life. To his virile mind, real things, commonplace matters, were poems. The imagination of the inventor was the inspiration of his muse; his rhymesters beat with hammers.

With hands clasped behind her, she stood still. Her conception of existence seemed all at once aimless, indeterminate!

After lingering a few moments longer in his study, she returned to her own sitting-room. Certain little sins of omission in their domestic economy she resolutely began to repair and in a sudden fervor of alertness and attention to detail, she found that comparative forgetfulness she courted.

The neglected ash-tray was the starting point. The deposition, examination and testimony regarding this crime of carelessness; the summoning of witnesses directly and indirectly concerned, were antidotes to her disquietude. She abruptly developed into a despot, and her subjects—or servitors—with consternation discovered that her régime promised to lack that supineness they at first had fondly looked for.

At nightfall as she dressed for dinner, the morning's conversation with her father again took possession of her thoughts. She wanted to question Mr. Strong; she half-

intended to do so, and yet the desire was not unmixed with reluctance. Pride and humiliation strove within her; she shrank from asking, half-fearing her doubts might be realized. One moment her pride was up in arms; the next moment disarmed by a new and softer feeling.

The dinner hour seemed long in coming; she listened with impatience for his step at the door. But finally he came—somewhat late—and she went down to dinner, her heart beating a little fast. Neither she nor Richard Strong had ever much to say during that ceremonial occasion. Perhaps the high walls and massive style of interior architecture of the room threw a depressing influence upon them. Perhaps the titanic and merry banqueting figures in the gay tapestries made man and wife seem very small and quiet in that apartment, designed for the reception of a goodly company.

Leaning her head on her hand, she looked furtively at him from time to time. Her gown was white and gauzy and above the mist of lace-work, a string of pearls encircled her neck. Over her shoulders fell a gold-brown curl, as if to emphasize the tender whiteness of its resting-place. The glimmer of her eyes was bright like the sheen of the pearls.

“The Stantons are at Newport,” she said at length.

“A great many people are,” he answered.

A brief silence! In the soft light from the chandelier his face did not, perhaps, appear as harsh as usual. Or did it really seem harsh to her at all? Her father was the weak point in her heart; Richard Strong had touched that point. He had been of service to him. Unwittingly, perhaps; but she did not pause now to analyze or canvass his reasons.

"It must be very gay at the sea-shore, or soon will be," she went on.

"Do you want to go?" he asked suddenly.

She hesitated, looked at him quickly; then shook her head.

"No, I don't care to," she answered slowly.

Her fingers played with the fork while she gazed at, and yet beyond, an old Dutch still-life on the wall; a cornucopia, or horn of plenty, overrunning with a profusion of fruits, grapes and flowers.

"Do you know Mr. Stanton?" she said after a pause.

"No," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, not for any special reason," she returned vaguely.

"I thought perhaps you might!"

He offered no comment; only lighted his cigar, and began smoking methodically. Her gaze impatiently followed the butler as he moved noiselessly around the table, but at length he vanished, and they found themselves alone. She leaned back; a question that had

framed itself in her mind trembled on her lips; she was about to speak when the chimes of the tall clock began to strike. He looked at his watch, laid down his cigar and arose.

"You are going out?" she asked quickly.

"There is a business meeting at the St. Nicholas!"

Her face shadowed. "It must be nice to be a man and have—business meetings!" As she spoke, she, too, arose and stood leaning with her hand against the table. "Your meeting is very important?"

"Very." He regarded her with mild surprise. Her manner puzzled him. She seemed to-night as she had been when he had first known her; she, of late, so proud and still!

"Was there anything—"

"No, nothing!" she answered hastily.

He caught her eyes and started; then turned abruptly, even brusquely away. A few moments later she heard the front door close and a carriage drive off.

Going to the window of the reception-room, she looked after it until it disappeared. In the semi-darkness, her mind swept rapidly over the brief-long period of her married life. In that short month and more how often had rebellion sprung into her breast!

"I won't endure it; I won't endure it!" she had said to herself, but had ended by temporizing with the future.

She was temporizing now. With sudden lassitude she passed her hand across her forehead. About her were trailing shadows; the heavy perfume of many roses hung over one of the great vases and she leaned her head against it.

The sound of the front door-bell was heard; she half-turned and listened; a familiar voice inquired for Mrs. Strong.

"Yes; I'm home, Cousin Charlie!" she said herself, and stepping toward the hall, Elinor the next moment clasped the hand of Charlie Dalton.

"Just dropped in to see how you were getting on," he said. "Hope I'm not disturbing you?"

"Not at all!" she answered quickly. "I am delighted." Her face looked a little flushed as she raised it to his. "Won't you come into the library?"

CHAPTER XIV

ELINOR MAKES A RESOLUTION

"Are you alone?" said Dalton, as they entered a brightly-lighted room on the other side of the hall.

"Yes; Mr. Strong went out on business. But why haven't you been here before?" she hastened to add.

The young man hesitated, a touch of constraint in his manner.

"Really, I haven't any excuse except—"

"No excuse is better than a poor one," she interrupted, and dropped lightly into a chair. "So never mind about taxing your ingenuity."

"Well, I won't then," said Charlie, with a faint laugh, and drew a cigar from his pocket. "You don't object?"—indicating the weed. "You never used to."

"There are the matches—on the table," she said, and settled herself more comfortably in the large leather chair. "But what have you been doing with yourself?" she added, regarding him with something of the half-proprietary air of the past.

"Not much," he answered. "You knew that I went into Mr. Strong's office a while ago?"

She nodded.

"That has meant a good deal to me," he said. "It came just at the right time, too." He was silent a moment, smoking thoughtfully. Elinor studied the handsome face before her.

"How—how did you happen to go into Mr. Strong's office?" she at length asked, rather hesitatingly.

Charlie proceeded to relate to her the substance of the interview he had had with Richard Strong.

"But hasn't he ever spoken to you about it?" he added, as he concluded, an inquiring look in his dark-blue eyes.

Elinor colored a little. "Not just how—how it happened to come about."

"Perhaps he likes to leave the talk of the Street behind him," suggested Charlie, still searching her with his glance.

"The Street!" she exclaimed, quickly turning the conversation. "What a veiled mystery! Do women ever go there?"

An ironical smile crossed the other's face. "Yes—sometimes! Spiritualistic mediums and war-widows, for example! The commodore, you know," he added, "has a special medium, although, for my part, I don't

think the psychic force had much to do with his cornering Hudson or Harlem."

"All that men seem to think about nowadays is—stocks!" she observed somewhat irrelevantly.

"And women—Stewart's!"

She lifted her brows, smoothing down her dress reflectively with her hand.

"The men have their Exchange and the women—theirs!" went on Dalton, sententiously.

Her foot moved with sudden impatience. "You mean all women think of is—spending money?"

He held his cigar in mid air. "Her first, sole and only ambition!"

The flashing brown eyes met the satirical blue ones.

"It seems to me I heard of some one at college who started very rapidly to get rid of all he had."

Charlie's face perceptibly changed. "There wasn't much to get rid of," he said. "Some one else did the disencumbering."

She laughed rather revengefully. "I suppose it would have been just the same in the end."

He did not answer, and rising abruptly, she took a few steps across the room.

"How would you like a little music?"

Charlie got up, too.

"By all means! But you're not impatient with me?"

Though that would be very like old times! As a small girl you always had your own way," he added reflectively.

"Did I?"

"Rather! Remember the day we eloped?"

He stood by her side now, her head on a level with his shoulder. She smiled up at him.

"Eloped? With *you*?"

He overlooked the emphasis.

"You must have been about ten; you were angry at some one—your mother, I think—and wanted to run away from home. So we started—I didn't seem to have much to say about it—only to go along—you were on my sled and I was drawing you—we came to a snowdrift and you fell into it—"

"And you," she interrupted, "ran away of course and left me! But now—what shall I play?"

He followed her to the piano. "There was that Gottschalk piece—"

She ran her fingers lightly over the keyboard. "Yes, that's it," he said.

Leaning on the piano, he watched her. The light from the lamp fell full on her face; the down-turned lashes veiled her eyes, but although the white fingers scampered merrily enough, her features expressed no answering emotion. In the midst of an unusually brilliant variation, she hesitated.

"I think I've forgotten the rest,"—and Gottschalk merged into Chopin.

For a few moments she played with new feeling and abandon; then her hands stopped again upon the keys.

"I don't believe I am very musical," she said capriciously, and arose.

Charlie started. "I never heard you play better."

She regarded him incredulously.

He drew at his cigar; then held it out with a smile.

"Isn't this a convincing bit of evidence? It's gone out."

Quickly she went to the mantel. "After such a compliment—"

The sentence remained unfinished in words, but selecting a match, she struck it and crossed to him. Above the flame, he looked at her, and a sudden light seemed to kindle his eyes; their hands just touched.

"Thank you!" he said.

For some time Charlie lingered. He smoked not one, but three cigars, and, although he exerted his own conversational powers, Elinor's vivacity of the earlier part of the evening seemed to desert her. At length he arose.

"I must really be off," he said. "I left Tom Marks waiting for me at the club."

Once on the street, however, the young man did not show any disposition to hasten to his destination. He

sauntered along slowly, his brows knit, switching now and then absent-mindedly with his cane. The thoughtful expression of his face changed by degrees to one of irritation. His cane cut the air sharply. "I'll go there no more," he said suddenly, aloud, and with a quick, decisive movement, he hastened his steps.

After Dalton had gone and Elinor returned to the library, that lowness of spirits she had experienced before he came seemed intensified. And with it came a certain impatience. She looked at the clock; Richard Strong was out later than usual. She wondered what he was doing. The business conference must have been unusually important to have detained him so long.

In spite of the hour, she felt wakeful. Near the window the curtains moved slowly to and fro, as if some unseen hand were waving them to attract her attention. She half-smiled, as the fantasy moved her; then holding her head a little higher in seeming disdain of ghostly signs and tokens, she walked to the curtains and looped them up. Immediately all portentous indications ceased; the room relapsed into its normal conditions, and with its many shelves became simply a place for study and reflection.

Elinor, however, moving restlessly around the library, looked with indifference, if not distaste, upon the ponderous volumes entombed in red levant or gilded calf. Finally she paused with an air of dissatisfaction.

"I wonder what people do when they want to do something and don't know how to do it," she thought impatiently, as she leaned against the arm of the leather chair and mechanically turned over some engravings in a portfolio on a stand before her. With scant interest at first, her eye attracted while her mind remained afar, she surveyed a medieval picture—an armed man and a maiden! The vizor of the former's helmet was down; nothing could be seen of his face. Beneath the engraving was written in script:

"The buckling on of the knight's armor by the lady's hand was not a mere caprice of romantic fashion. It is the type of an eternal truth—"

Elinor fell casually to wondering what the man would look like if the helmet should be removed and the warrior shorn of his iron suit. Would the face be handsome; the figure, a gallant one? A knight on his first quest, perhaps with golden hair and chivalrous eyes? Or would there be revealed the countenance of the hardy, tried soldier?

More likely the latter by the breadth of shoulder! She felt amused at the incongruity between the two figures in this highly sentimental picture and then found herself looking at her own hands. She wondered if it would be very difficult to "buckle on armor." The thought seized her that the enigmatic iron shell might have hidden some one like—Richard Strong!

She clasped her hands and looked away. That grim, steel puzzle; the slender lady—were they symbolical of life? How absurd! She shut up the portfolio.

Sinking back into the chair, she closed her eyes.

“I suppose,” she told herself, “I *might* make myself, in some degree or measure, useful to him!” And with the thought came the conviction, that, however small or great the result, she owed it to herself to act upon it. The tiny monitor thrilled within her breast; pride whispered hopeful possibilities. A sudden resolution animated her; her days need be no longer aimlessly wasted. She would equip herself in knowledge; establish between her husband and herself a bond of mutual helpfulness. Other women had done so. Why could not she succeed? She felt her limitations for the task, but at the moment they seemed only a spur to her purpose.

And a sudden peace came over her—or was it weariness? She vaguely realized that she was dozing, and did not care; that the knight had begun to take off his helmet, but she could not see him because of a cloud. The drooping of her head aroused her, and, with an effort, she arose and went up stairs.

CHAPTER XV

ELINOR BREAKS A RESOLUTION

Secretly Elinor began to familiarize herself with her husband's business; to study the history of the great commercial highways; from reports she found on his desk at the house; by judicious inquiry,—indeed, as best she might! And studying all this, she was unconsciously studying Richard Strong. His nature unfolded beneath her eyes as the manifold formation of diatoms to the peering gaze of the microscopist. At times, she admired; again, wondered. A hand of velvet; an arm of iron! The power to create; the ability to construct! Was it all genius, or tenacity of purpose—or is the former but the latter? These surreptitious visits to his study began to exercise a peculiar fascination over her.

She was further stimulated in her self-imposed task along these special lines by a wave of popular interest in the problems of transportation. On every side predominated railroad talk; leading articles in all the papers and magazines devoted much space to the consideration of

that great achievement, the final opening of the first highway from ocean to ocean. Even the impressionable poets broke out in flowing, if not always metrically correct, measures:

“Rivet the last Pacific rail
 With a silver hammer and a golden nail,
 For over the hill and over the vale
 The iron horse is swiftly coming.
 Hail to the age of steam!
 Hail to the iron team!
 Hail to the iron bars!
 Hail to our flag of stars!”

The days of fresh breezes had merged into a period of somnolence; August, slothful, heavy, began to drag its weary length along. The hot waking hours were succeeded by the sultry nights, when the languid air circulated, close and oppressive, above the heated pavements.

On such a night—or, at the twilight hour of such a day—Elinor was seated in her room near the window, alternately engaged in reading and gazing dubiously without. Over a patch of sky, visible from her window, hung a dull bank of clouds which lightened and glowed, and then grew dark again. This operation, repeated at fairly regular intervals, lent a menacing aspect to the heavens which was not even relieved by the reassuring glimmer of a single star, the first to appear, set in the lake of ether at the foot of the phosphorescent bank.

But while her mind thus concerned itself with objective phenomena, her thoughts dwelt, also, upon a subject she knew Richard Strong was then considering; a very common problem, although not a very simple one, in railroad management: how to keep the expenses of a certain line from outrunning the revenue. She asked herself what course he would pursue. First, probably, would come repairs, and then new trains and tracks and—

“I can’t understand it,” she pondered. “Whenever things seem to be running behind, he spends more money. That’s the way mama used to do, and—it didn’t seem to answer at all.”

She pursed her brow quizzically. “It must be that railroad economy is different from domestic economy. The more things we bought, the poorer we became.”

She shook her head. There was no doubt of that. Then her mouth relaxed. “If we could only have called our debts—bonds!”

“If”—she was continuing to follow this train of fancy when the voice of Mr. Strong in his study, reaching her ears, abruptly interrupted the trend of futile imagining.

“Have I not told you no one was to interfere with my papers?”

“I did not touch them, sir,” she heard the servant reply.

"One document is missing! What has become of it?"

Elinor dropped the book, a rush of blood tingling her cheeks, and, rising hastily, went to her desk. Taking a paper, tied with tape, from a pigeonhole, she stepped into the hall and approached the door of the private study. Richard Strong, with obvious annoyance, was bending over his work-table; in the center of the room stood the servant, expostulation and innocence written on his face.

"Is this what you are looking for?"

He took with some surprise the paper she handed him.

"Yes," he said. And to the servant: "You may go."

"I did not know you felt—that way—about your desk," she went on hurriedly, when the man had disappeared. "Or I"—she paused with heightened color.

"What I said was, of course, for the servant," he returned. "If you"—he stopped abruptly. "But why—what could you—"

She laughed nervously, feeling almost like a child detected in some covert act. "Maybe, I was a little curious—*prying*, you probably think it—"

He made a quick, dissenting gesture. "Well, then call it only curiosity. Perhaps"—lightly—"it interested me, because it was tied up."

Still puzzled, he looked at her; then at the report. The faintest perfume hung over it. That brief sojourn

in a lady's boudoir had changed its character; it seemed to have become more personal and less documentary than formerly; even the tape was tied in a bow-knot, eminently feminine. What interest could she have in its contents, —technicalities pertaining to track inspection; the examination of bridges, grades and crossings; the securing of connections eastward?

A glimmer of light in the heavens suddenly illumined the room, and, following the flash, the dimness of the waning day appeared abruptly turned into the darker shadows of night. Her face for the moment was less discernible, but he had seen the half-faltering look, emphasized by the unexpected irradiation.

"Do you think it is going to storm?" she asked as, rising, he drew the curtains, and lighted the gas.

"I think so."

"It *feels* as though it might," she said, brushing back the masses of hair from her moist forehead. Then she walked to the window and peered out behind the draperies. The vaporous bank had become a gloomy, sullen mountain; the lake glowed with a nameless, mysterious hue. In the silence, with something impending in the heavens, she experienced a stronger need of human companionship. Her secret aspirations became large in her breast; the temptation to touch upon them grew in the silence.

"Mama and I went to the Sorosis to-day," she said finally, without turning.

"The Sorosis!" he spoke up quickly.

"Yes; mama, you know, is now a member."

"And follower of Lucy Stone, Ernestine L. Rose and—Miss Anthony?"

"I don't know as she goes—so far as that. I think mama likes the excitement." She was silent a moment. "Don't you believe in some of those things, yourself?" she asked vaguely.

He glanced at the girl; her cheeks were flushed with the warmth of the night; her eyes bright. His own gaze was steady.

"I believe," he returned, "in Dr. Holmes' words: 'The brain-women never interest us like the heart-women; white roses please less than the red!'"

She half-smiled. "Alice Cary should be here to answer you in verse."

"I prefer prose," he said, returning to his report.

"You don't want, then, to see women striving?" She faced him with a little excitement in her manner. "To be of greater service to themselves and to—to others?" She hesitated, disconcerted at having nearly betrayed her purpose. She did not want him to know—yet—what had been in her mind. "You disapprove," she added, with forced lightness, "of the girl of the period?"

The mind of the man at the desk caught strongly at her last words. "The Girl of the Period!" A cant phrase on the street! Only that day the copy of a scurrilous London paper had come into his hands; a sheet deservedly lampooned by Mr. Greeley, or one of his editors. Before Mr. Strong's eyes flashed the cartoon: "The Croquet Girl;" "The Nautical Girl;" "The Girl of Finance!" A puritanical strain in his nature revolted; unwittingly he thought with the old philosopher—a woman's greatest glory was to be little talked about.

"The girl of the period!" he repeated dryly. "I have no taste for her."

Her lip quivered a little; his coldness cut her; the irony of his voice belittled those impulses that had stirred her. She felt as if she had offered him something and he had rejected the free gift—curtly, brusquely! Humility, mingled, perhaps, with resentment, moved her. She bit her lip and walked toward the door.

"You are very busy," she began, and would have gone, when the forces of the storm without, marshaling their energy, smote the heavens with a sudden forked shaft of living fire and followed this fierce onslaught with a mighty reverberation.

Before Elinor knew it she was at Richard Strong's side. The deafening waves of sound ceased and died away. Silence, ominous, followed; she waited; it re-

mained unbroken; then the rain pattered against the blinds.

Involuntarily he had arisen to meet that unconscious movement. She stood near him now, half-turned, listening to the rush of rain. Out of some cloud that had hung over him long—it seemed—flashes of light appeared to break. “White roses or red?” She wore a bunch of the latter in her gown. He put out his hands swiftly, almost fiercely, but at that moment she stepped suddenly toward the window.

“I felt *sure* a storm was coming,” she said, unconscious of his gesture.

He made no reply. Intentional or instinctive, her movement was typical. An abrupt anger consumed him; that momentary loss of self-command told heavily upon his pride. His hands fell to his side. Red roses might please most, but—he thought of the figure of a beggar he had seen in London staring through the bars at the inaccessible flowers of a park that was closed to him. He, a—

She was looking at him again; his manner was strange, and she laughed nervously.

“Don’t you think you are a little unjust?” she remarked half-wistfully.

“To whom?” A spark flashed from his eyes to hers.

“To—why, the ladies of the Sorosis!”

"I don't know anything about the ladies of the Sorosis," he replied, "or what their professions may be. I was referring to women who leave the duties of their own sex to invade the privileges of the other."

Her cheek grew cold; the sound of the rain mingled with the whirl of her thoughts. She held herself inflexible; all the softness had gone from her glance.

"The privileges of the other!" she said. "Getting money, you mean?"

"If you care to draw that inference!" he returned calmly.

"Is there any other?" she asked carelessly.

Only that strong earliest dislike, the first promptings of her nature at the sight of him, now moved her. She laughed lightly; then laughed a little louder when she saw his cheek flush at her words. That she had the power to wound him gave her, in her moment of humiliation, a novel pleasure. Had he not misinterpreted her, misjudged her, pressed upon her shoulder the great weight of his bounty? She breathed deeply as if to lift it from her, but could not. The longing to go somewhere—away—possessed her.

"How warm it is!" she exclaimed impatiently. "New York is becoming very uncomfortable."

"I must soon go west," he spoke up slowly, "and if you—"

"West!" she interrupted blankly.

"If you and Mr. and Mrs. Rossiter desire to go to the sea-shore or to the mountains," he continued, "there is no reason why you should not do so."

Her look of sudden acquiescence did not escape him.

"I shall be away for some time," he continued, "and you can make your plans to suit yourselves. Even when I have returned, you need not feel bound to gage your movements by mine."

"Very well," she said quickly. And at the door: "I will see mama to-morrow."

In her room an unnatural calmness replaced all other emotions in her breast. Without, the rain had ceased, but from the blinds the water dripped monotonously. Above, the heaven was alight with stars, shining with new-born luster. Afar sounded a faint rumble and roar, like the distant bombardment of a beleaguered city.

"Simpleton!" she told herself. "Simpleton!"

The knight and the lady!—she had only hurt her fingers on the buckles of the armor.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. DALTON TAKES A SUDDEN RESOLUTION

When Charlie told Elinor that his going into Richard Strong's office had meant much to him, he had in mind the good fortune that had followed him since he had procured employment with that financier. In the beginning his position at the office had been difficult to define. The first week his services had not been greatly in demand; he had had the choice of drumming his fingers idly on his desk in the little room assigned to him, or perusing some of the financial literature, law-books or industrial pamphlets to be found in the office library. He chose the latter, and his mind, naturally retentive, lent itself readily to the consideration of the work of the professional corporation statistician. Leaning back in his chair, his equanimity was in no wise disturbed by the sputtering of pens, the hurrying of feet and the general air of activity around him. Wrapped in such enticing fancies as these facts and descriptions evoked—financial castles in the air—he looked upon the mercurial figures passing his door with stoical and philosophical gravity.

But one day Mr. Strong entered the young man's office, in his hand a number of papers and reports. Charlie put down a red-covered volume and arose. Richard Strong looked from the discarded book to Dalton.

"I have been somewhat at a loss what to give you to do," he said. "It has always been my endeavor to fit a man into the niche where he belongs." Charlie bowed, but did not answer, and the other laid the papers he carried on the young man's desk. "Look these over; the matter is self-explanatory. When you have studied it thoroughly, submit your conclusions."

"Thank you, sir," replied Dalton. "I'll do my best." And as Mr. Strong turned away, he closed the door and bent with avidity to the work.

The devising of ways and means for harmonizing certain small, but conflicting interests--that was the problem the other had set before him to solve. It was neither very difficult nor very easy, but the task was to Charlie's liking, and, as he proceeded, a sparkle of excitement came into his eyes. Lightly he disentangled the skein; deftly adjusted the threads. With care he formulated his plan, put it on paper as concisely as possible, and then submitted it to Mr. Strong, who considered it, said nothing, but to the young man's satisfaction, adopted it.

Thereafter Dalton's position brought him into a relationship, more or less personal, with the head of the

house. He was not exactly a private secretary or a clerk, although he performed the duties of both when required. He was industrious, willing, had already acquired useful information during his experience in the Street, and to his work brought the best efforts of a keen and active brain.

But Dalton, although zealous for others when it served his end, had never had the intention of confining his exertions solely to his employer's interests. The idea of self too strongly predominated. To enrich that self; to advance that self; to make that self a power among men! He had before him the encouraging example of Jim Jubilee. What had that gentleman amounted to when he had only slaved for Daniel Drew? But how had he risen when he had "struck out for himself"!

Chance, before long, brought to Charlie the coveted opportunity, if not to emulate that striking and picturesque precedent, at least in some degree to promote his own individual fortunes. One noon, having left the office, he had but turned into a side thoroughfare, when a voice accosted him from a neighboring doorway.

"Hello, Dalton!" And a soft, chubby hand was thrust into his. Charlie stopped. The man represented one of the many varieties of the genus broker, and was facetiously known as the "Jolly Boy," his establishment being a pleasant place at which to spend an hour at noon, or

after the close of the business day. His hospitality had won him a certain clientage of inabstinent spirits who helped themselves to the choice cigars or the excellent lunch set forth in the private office for their benefit.

"How do you do?" returned Dalton, somewhat coldly.

He knew that in the course of his brief connection with the Street he had been introduced to the other on some occasion, but did not remember just when or where.

"Heard you'd gone into Richard Strong's office," went on the broker, and Dalton nodded. "Can you give me a few moments? I want to have a talk with you."

Charlie looked surprised. "Well," he said, hesitating, "I haven't much time to spare."

"Won't take but a minute," was the reassuring response. And leading the way to a private office, back of a number of main offices, he motioned his visitor to a chair. A dorky who wore an apron and a smile that seemed a reflex of the Jolly Boy's, appeared from some recess and stood before them in an expectant manner.

"Have a little lobster salad and a glass of sauterne," urged the broker.

"No, thanks," returned Charlie. "I don't care for anything."

His tone left no room for argument or persuasion, and the broker was too keen a judge of people to press his

hospitable invitation. With an airy wave of his hand he dismissed the dusky servitor.

"All right," he said, and his manner changed; the spirit of the loving-cup gave way on his countenance to an expression of business; his face grew sober. "What I wanted to say is this: just drop in when you feel like it." Dalton looked at him quickly. "And if you should hear of a good thing, a dead sure thing"—speaking slowly and with a peculiar emphasis—"come to me. I'm not a niggardly sort of a chap and—well, you won't have to put up anything. You can have what credit you want."

The young man's gaze became suddenly veiled; unresponsive. He did not reply at once.

"I'll think of it," he said at length, ambiguously.

The Jolly Boy did not press the subject, but relapsed again into his urbane self.

"Heard the story about Travers and the Fisk-Gould yacht?" he asked. "No? Well, Jim was showing Travers over it the other day. In the cabin, on either side, are two portraits, one of Jim and one of Gould. 'What do you think of them?' says Jim. 'Very g-g-good!' says Travers, holding his head like a cock-sparrow. 'Only one c-c-criticism to make!' 'What's that?' says Jim, innocent-like. 'To complete the effect, there should be a p-p-picture of our Saviour in the m-m-middle!' says Travers."

Dalton laughed and pushed back his chair. "Well, I must be off," he said, and the other accompanied him to the door.

When, several weeks later, the young man reappeared at the office of the Jolly Boy, that person did not conceal his gratification, and shook him warmly by the hand.

"Sell me a thousand Yellow Dragon at one hundred and eighty or thereabouts," said Charlie, quietly.

The broker opened his eyes. To the purchaser at par, the stock of Oriental Mail—as it was known in the papers of incorporation—represented a profit of over nine hundred per cent., including yearly dividends of twenty per cent. What did Dalton mean by selling such a valuable property?

"Lord, man, what is it?" he said.

"Arrangements are being perfected for a competing corporation. The Dragon has been shamefully abused and"—significantly—"the new organization will be a sort of St. George."

"That is worth knowing," returned the broker, eagerly. "You are sure—quite sure?"

"What do you think?"

"I think you're in a position to know," said the other, with decision. A moment he looked thoughtful. "I'll tell you what I'll do," he said slowly. "We must keep it

very quiet and—I'll make you partner in a two-thousand-share deal."

Dalton consented; the stock was sold; in a week it registered at one hundred and seventy.

"Just as you said it would," remarked the Jolly Boy, with real or affected admiration in his tone. "You're a born speculator, sir! Got all the attributes. Mark my words, sir, and, when the time comes"—laying his hand in a fatherly manner on Charlie's shoulder—"remember it was me—me who told you so."

To these subtle shafts of flattery Dalton did not respond as the other expected.

"You can buy back my thousand now and I'll take my profits," he said.

"Aren't you—just a leetle cautious?" ventured the other.

Charlie shrugged his shoulders. "We have both made money. As far as I am concerned, our deal is at an end."

"All right," returned the Jolly Boy. "You can walk right up to the captain's office and get your check,"—and smiled brightly.

But Dalton had no intention of deserting the Yellow Dragon yet by any means. It had occurred to him, however, that he might better keep his operations quiet by trading at many places, and he also preferred entirely to sever his connection with the Jolly Boy now that he was

in a position to do without him. Accordingly he divided his profits among various other brokers. The Yellow Dragon came crashing down to one hundred and fifty. Dalton had first doubled, then trebled his short sales; his earnings now were large.

"Buy in!" whispered expediency.

Charlie set his teeth and continued to sell. Twenty-four hours thereafter, the annual report of the company was given to the public. The directors, having long ago disposed of their holdings, now in a spasm of dilatory honesty showed assets marked down, giving the stock an intrinsic value of one hundred and ten. Following this frank, though tardy, exposition of the Dragon's enfeebled and crippled condition, the entire Street turned upon the languishing and broken monster. Dalton bought back in the neighborhood of one hundred and twenty all the stock he had sold and retired from the arena.

The next day Charlie discovered the wise and discerning rumor-mongers had fairly ferreted out his own part in the running contest, and, as he made his way to the office, he was several times stopped and congratulated. But one man he encountered—the Jolly Boy—had no words of compliment for him. The jovial one's expression was funereal, saturnine; he held his chubby hand tight behind his back.

"So?" he said, "you're the kind of a partner that isn't a partner."

In spite of his coolness, Charlie flushed.

"I don't understand you," he said.

"We started in together; you made use of me; then played it alone. You 'covered' at my place, but kept on increasing your short interest elsewhere. It deceived me and I bought all the way down."

Charlie smiled deprecatorily. "I didn't deceive you," he answered warmly. "I had no intention of deceiving you. You deceived yourself. I left you with a profit. If you did not take it, I can't see what fault it is of mine. I told you our deal was at an end. It never occurred to me that you would place such a construction on what I did."

The chubby hand tightened into a chubby fist; the rubicund face became apoplectic.

"All right!" he said. "You used me and dumped me. You've made a lump sum and an enemy. It's a bad way to start in Wall Street."

Dalton turned. "When you come to think it over, you will exonerate me from all blame," he replied, and dismissed the incident from his mind.

As he entered the office he wondered whether Richard Strong had heard of his operations in Yellow Dragon and how that gentleman would regard them.

"Mr. Strong has been asking for you, sir," said Tim Taplin, as Charlie unlocked his desk.

"Now for it!" thought the young man.

But to his surprise the financier evinced no disposition to touch upon Oriental Mail; his one desire seemed to be to expedite certain present plans of his own. His manner was abstracted; before him lay a railroad time-table. Finally he swung around from his desk and Charlie arose.

"One moment, Dalton." The young man lingered expectant. Would Mr. Strong attempt to take him to task? To his surprise the other said: "I am going away—out west!"

"When do you expect to return?"

"I can't say just when." He was silent a moment. "Mrs. Strong is going to Newport. If she should want anything, I wish you would see that it is attended to."

"Certainly, Mr. Strong," said the young man, quickly. "I will be of any service I can."

As Dalton some time later left the building, a carriage drew up near by. Upon the back seat were two actresses and from the vehicle descended no less a person than the doughty prince of peddlers, "the oiled and curled Assyrian bull of Wall Street," Mr. Fisk. This individual paused a moment to speak with one of the ladies, the blonde queen of a burlesque troupe, and as he did so, his

gaze fell on Charlie. He had met that young man only once, but the news of success travels quickly, and Mr. Fisk—who never forgot a face unless he wished to—now not only nodded to Mr. Dalton, but turned to speak with him.

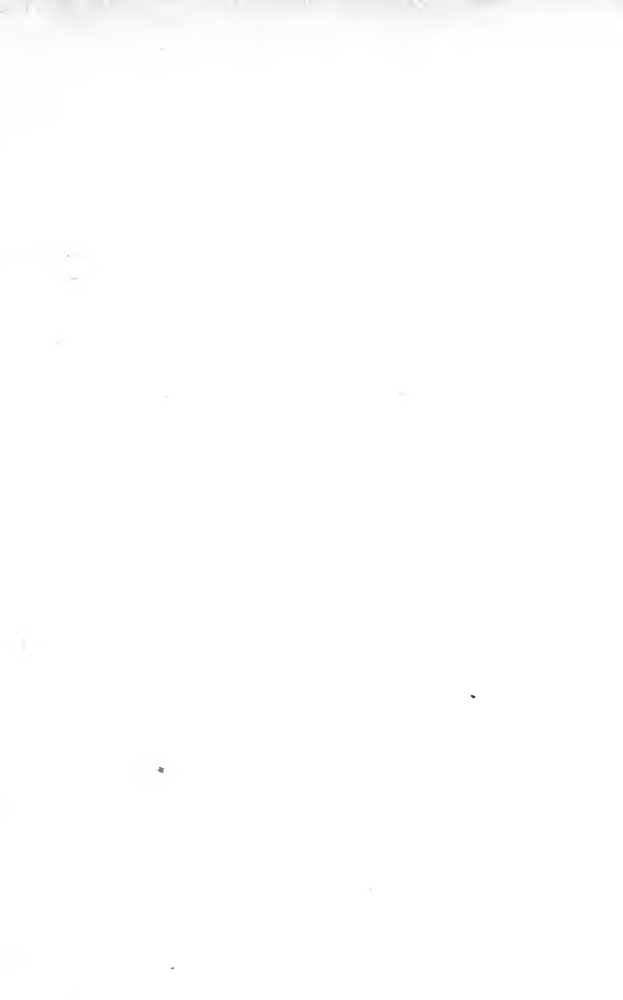
“Good for you, Dalton!” he said. “If you keep on, we’ll have to make you a director in Erie. I was telling these ladies about you, and one of them”—with a wave of his bejeweled fingers toward the dark, black-eyed young woman who sat by the side of the fair lady—“had just expressed a desire to see you. You have probably heard of her—the peerless, the incomparable Zol—”

Charlie raised his eyes to the lady indicated and all thoughts of the Yellow Dragon and stocks vanished. Mechanically he lifted his hat.

“I am flattered,” he said. And then: “Excuse me, please—some important business—” And quickly turning into the press of the crowd, he hurried unceremoniously away.

The Prince of Erie looked after him with growing wonder. The dark lady began to laugh. She was wonderfully dressed in the latest Parisian style, with a fantastic hat poised most bewitchingly upon her black hair. Her tiny hand held an enormous bouquet and in her ears sparkled large diamonds. Her laughter was low, musical, unconventional.





"I don't see what there is to laugh about," said Mr. Fisk.

"Nothing," answered the dark lady, with a pronounced French accent. "Only it was too amus-ing!"—and laughed again.

At dinner that night, Charlie was unusually thoughtful. Despite his sudden comparative affluence his flow of spirits seemed to have suffered a temporary check. The game-bird was too high; the wine suggested tincture of logwood; his cigar burned imperfectly and the band played too loudly. Even to that sprightly and popular selection, *Shoo Fly, Don't Bodder Me!* he listened with a bored and weary expression. Mr. Marks could not fail to observe his changed demeanor, and after a vain endeavor to promote his companion's good humor, remarked:

"Charlie, you look run down. You need a change; a vacation!"

Dalton's face brightened somewhat.

"By Jove, I believe you're right, Tom," he said suddenly, after a moment of silence. "I'll take a few days as soon as I can. Narragansett—the races—Goldsmith's Maid—India Rubber and Daisy Burns—what do you say to that?"

"But Charlie—"

"Nonsense, old chap! You've got to come, too, and that settles it."

"But," again expostulated Tom, "playing the horses isn't much better than—"

"Oh, well," laughed Dalton, rather queerly, "if we feel the need of a nice, tranquil spot, there's sleepy Newport, right next door."

CHAPTER XVII

AN INTERRUPTED DANCE

“You darling!”

Posie Stanton, all lace, muslin and flowers, rushed toward Elinor, as the latter, preceding Mr. and Mrs. Rossiter, and a man with luggage, descended the gangway of the boat from New York, and now stood upon the wharf before old Newport town.

“Really, my dear!” expostulated Mrs. Rossiter, as Miss Stanton, turning from her girl-friend, impetuously flew to that startled but worthy lady.

“Won’t you let Elinor drive up to the hotel with me?” swiftly went on Posie, after the greetings were over. “I came down with my cart and—”

“Go along, then, at once!” laughed Mr. Rossiter, good-naturedly. “Your mother and I will follow in a few moments,”—in answer to his daughter’s look. “Of course you’ve so much to tell it won’t keep.”

Mr. Rossiter looked approvingly after them, while Mrs. Rossiter readjusted her India shawl and ruffled Mechlin laces not without some show of ruffled composure.

Through throngs of tourists and summer visitors Posie and Elinor pushed their way to where, near the wharf, stood an English dog-cart, with a tandem team. Entering this vehicle, which attracted some attention, not altogether commendatory, from the year-round dwellers in the narrow streets near the wharves, Miss Stanton grasped the reins, and they were whirled along past the quaint, old-time houses into the newer part of the town; thence onward across the southern portion of the island, dotted here and there with modest cottages. The beach lay white before them, shimmering near-by in sandy ripples left by the receding tide; afar, gulls with lazy wings cleft the mists that curled torpidly around the isle.

"How delightful of Mr. Strong to let you come here, instead of dragging you out west among the Indians and the cow-boys!" said Miss Stanton, beaming upon her friend. "So many men insist upon taking their wives with them everywhere like the rest of their luggage!"

Elinor's gaze seemed suddenly to be directed far out on the ocean, and she murmured some vague reply. "But you haven't told me yet who is here?" she added, turning.

"Quite a number of people you know," replied Posie, as they approached the hotel. "Mrs. Fanning—'It was at my house dear Elinor first met Mr. Strong!'—Miss Webber, and her dogs; the Vanderhoffs—she's going to

get a divorce—Miss Garnett—who asks often about you—you must know her very well!”

“I knew an eye at a window, or peeping through half-closed shutters,—if that could be called an acquaintance!”

Posie nodded comprehensively. “Yes; she said she lived opposite you! Then there’s the Reverend Doctor Clement, and as for the rest of them”—drawing the cart up closely before the door—“you must see for yourself!”

Thereafter time lagged not. Though her moods were often variable Elinor’s capacity for enjoyment seemed to grow with the indulgence she permitted herself. Mr. Rossiter watched her with meditative eyes, but Mrs. Rossiter looked on with unqualified approval. To her it was quite proper and to be expected that Elinor should take her place in society, grasp at its pastimes and seize upon its pleasures.

One morning about a fortnight after their arrival, Elinor and Miss Stanton were driving near the beach where many persons were sunning themselves in costumes the antithesis to the Greek idea of chaste and appropriate drapery. Here if beauty was sacrificed, modesty, at any rate, did not suffer, for the expansive material distorted the figures of the wearers until no trace of the “human form divine” was discernible even to the

lively imagination. Children, as unsymmetrical in line and outline as their elders—miniature counterparts in pantalets and ample blouses of their mothers and their aunts—played upon the shining strand. An umbrella, lying open upon the beach, presumably shaded a sleeping old gentleman, or perhaps, screened from general view an engaged, or newly wedded pair.

Suddenly Elinor, who was driving, drew in the reins. As the cart came to a standstill, Miss Stanton perceived two masculine figures, not garbed for the sea, but in conventional business attire, outlined in the sunshine against the sand dune.

The "rainbow hat" on Posie's head nodded once or twice—a flowery beacon for wayfarers out of their reckoning on that sandy stretch! The signal was seen and answered and the couple drew near with evidence of reciprocal recognition; the foremost swinging a switch cane; the other holding his "cedar-berry" gloves very primly in his left hand!

"Glad to see you, Elinor!" exclaimed the taller of the two, his eyes lighting with unmistakable pleasure.

She extended her hand.

"And Miss Stanton—you are here, too?"

"Yes," said Elinor. "It was Posie's persuasive letters that induced me to come to Newport. But where did you drop from?"

"From Narragansett."

"Oh, the races! I should have known that."

"I didn't know you were of sporting proclivities, Mr. Marks," observed Posie, directing her glance upon that person, who held himself reluctantly back in the shadow of Dalton.

Mr. Marks blushed ingenuously, while Charlie laughed.

"Tom can pick a winner with the best of them," he said. "When Loiterer was a ten-to-one shot he looked her over. 'There's knee-action,' says he, 'and wind and heart for a rally!' Sure enough, Loiterer came down the stretch like a rocket, and was first at the finish."

"Dear me!" remarked Posie. The limpid eyes shone with unqualified admiration for the discerning Mr. Marks, who shifted uneasily.

"Really, you mustn't believe—"

"But the races at Narragansett do not explain your presence here, Charlie," said Elinor.

"Just thought we would run over for a change!" His gaze lingered on her. The slanting rays of the sun kissed her cheek; beneath her chin a ribbon fluttered in the breeze from the sea. "Besides, Tom was tired of winning."

"Now, you might have said you ran over to see us!"

put in Posie. "Although we haven't any races to offer you here."

"I dare say you have amusements equally diverting. You may not have trotting but—"

"We have gallops," interrupted Elinor.

"Exactly!" he laughed, and again regarded her.

She drew in the reins.

"Why don't you and Mr. Marks come to the dance at the hotel to-night?" urged Posie.

Charlie looked from her to Elinor.

"Shall we?" he asked.

She flicked the horse tentatively with the whip.

"I'm afraid it will be very dull after Narragansett!"

"But if we want to chance it?"

"In that case, I don't suppose any one would prevent you," she answered, and the vehicle sped on.

"What did you tell her about my picking Loiterer for?"

The Shadow's tone was actually aggressive.

"Eh?" said Charlie, absently.

"You heard what she said—"

Dalton turned. "Pshaw, Tom. Haven't you learned yet that it's not what a woman says but what she thinks?"

That night as Elinor stood in the center of a little group, Dalton entered the ball-room. Apparently he

caught sight of her at once, for he started in her direction, only to pause, not far distant, as if deterred from approaching nearer by a circle of black coats. But as he stopped she met his glance; the hesitation vanished from his manner and he stepped forward quickly.

"So you did conclude to come?" she said, giving him her hand. Her voice was gay; her eyes shone brightly.

"Couldn't stay away," he answered in the same tone.

For a few moments he lingered, involved in the intricacies of a sprightly, general conversation, and then, after some laughing excuse from her, found himself walking away, conscious of a light touch on his arm and of certain looks of disappointment that followed them.

"Did you see that?" Seated in a corner, commanding an outlook of ball-room and verand'a, Miss Garnett, Argus-eyed, had been critically observing the company of dancers in general and Elinor and her companion in particular. "She used to be Miss Rossiter." Her voice was full of significance as she turned to a lady seated next to her. "No dower! You understand? The young man is a sort of relative, I think—" Here her voice lowered discreetly, and the rest was lost in the ready ear of the listener. "But a match was out of the question, of course!" she added. "Mrs. Rossiter was too ambitious for that!"

"Where," asked the recipient of this information, "is *Mr. Strong*?"

"Out west!" returned Miss Garnett, with a sweet smile and a sweeter accent.

Unmindful of the interest they excited in the breasts of these good ladies, Elinor and Charlie paused a little apart from the vortex of moving figures. He looked across the floor, his manner preoccupied and thoughtful.

"They are trying their best to enjoy themselves," he finally observed.

"Trying!" she repeated. Then added: "Who was it said that to pursue joy was to lose it?"

"Some one who tried the game, I guess," answered Charlie.

His glance swung to her. The slight disorder of the brown curls seemed to bid defiance to those purely subjective and inward joys sung by the philosophers; the brilliancy of her eyes lighted a spark in his.

"What do you say to a dance, Elinor?"

"After such cynicism—"

"I retract—most humbly," he interposed quickly, and together they glided over the floor.

As the exhilarating rhythm of the music made itself felt, Charlie's face lost its half-moody look of the earlier part of the evening. Several times they circled the room.

"By Jove, you *can* dance!" he said at length.

"How flattering!" she retorted, her quick breath touching his cheek. He looked down at her and involuntarily his arm tightened when in the press of people they were brought to an abrupt and rather violent standstill by colliding with another couple.

Laughing, she released herself; at her feet lay several violets torn from her gown.

"I'm afraid, Charlie, I can't return your compliment." Secretly annoyed, he stooped for the flowers.

"Then you don't want to finish the dance?"

As he spoke the music stopped.

"It has finished itself," she answered, and placed a hand on his arm.

"Where now?" he asked.

"Anywhere."

He led her to the door and together they stepped upon the veranda. From the clatter of voices within to the comparative quietude without, was a tranquilizing change. For a moment Elinor stood, listening to the assuaging voices of the night, and facing the breeze with garments sweeping behind her. The air was full of rustlings, a strange crooning lullaby, running like a melody above an undertone.

"You don't find it too cool?"

She did not answer and he raised the violets; inhaled

them, watching her the while. The pale dimness from the myriad jets in the sky bathed her face, chastening yet revealing it to the young man's steadfast glance. In contrast to the gaiety of but a short time before, her expression now was sober, thoughtful. Many questions that had vaguely assailed him returned with redoubled force.

"Mr. Strong is coming back soon?"

Did she start?

"I haven't heard," she replied, and sank down into a chair.

"What! doesn't he say anything about it in his letters?"

"No; he hasn't referred to it—in his letters."

An indefinable subtlety of tone puzzled Charlie. Standing near the rail he lighted a cigar and smoked meditatively, striking the ashes frequently from the weed.

"Nor has he said anything about when he would be home in his letters to the office," observed Dalton. "Before I left, people kept dropping in. What was he doing? What consolidation was brewing?"

He saw her fingers interwine.

"Why?" she asked. "Does his being away make such a difference?"

"Because in his absence the little fellows are all out

of their reckoning! Afraid of their own shadows!" laughed Dalton.

Elinor laughed too! "I dare say they miss him very much."

He regarded her quickly. "Yes; almost as much as you do—"

"Only in a different way!"

The words sprang from her lips in spite of herself, half-lightly, half-mockingly. From his point of vantage Charlie detected a new expression on her face. What did it mean? A sudden glimpse of Mrs. Rossiter through the open window completed the picture. That good lady, majestically waving a fan, as waving aside all sentimental nonsense, was the World!

Charlie crushed the violets in his hand.

"I was right," he thought. "She was sacrificed, after all."

And something indefinite became definite within Dalton's breast. It flamed up like fire. With a quick gesture he threw his cigar savagely from him, and, wheeling around, looked away, out into the darkness.

At that moment the music began to play and she arose. "Shall we go in?"

Charlie started; turned. "If you"—he strove to modulate his voice to its conventional character—"will give me this dance."

She brushed her hand lightly across her eyes as she preceded him through the long, open window ; then faced him with a smile. "With pleasure, of course. I feel just like dancing to-night."

BOOK II



BOOK II

CHAPTER I

MR. STRONG RETURNS

The Hudson River train drew up noisily in the great terminal depot, and, among the first to alight, was a stalwart man, carrying a grip, who walked quickly through the smoke, past the panting monster, toward the entrance. Confronted by those persons awaiting the arriving passengers at the end of the long platform, the man almost eagerly scanned that miniature sea of faces. A comprehensive look, but amid the expressive countenances whereon was written every variety of expectant emotion, he apparently did not find some one he sought! His footsteps slackened; again he scrutinized the throng—men, women and children, smiling, beaming, some even waving handkerchiefs and hands at the incoming people—then pushed his way through the assembled crowd.

“How do you do, Mr. Strong?” At the same time a hand took the grip.

"Very well, James. Mrs. Strong got my telegram from Albany?"

"Yes, sir. This way to the carriage, sir."

Mr. Strong followed the man to the curb, gazing sharply toward the carriage as if he thought some one might be there—inside perhaps. But the carriage was empty—he saw that very plainly when the man threw open the door—and, as Richard Strong entered, his face, bronzed by the winds of the plains, expressed a trace of feeling. Disappointment? He would not acknowledge it, nor would he permit himself to analyze any intrusive emotion. Drawing an evening paper from his pocket with seeming unconcern he began to read by the failing light.

As they drove on, the familiar hum of the city failed to arrest his attention and it was not until the carriage stopped that he looked up, folded the paper and thrust it into his coat. Ascending the front steps of his home he felt for his keys, but found that he had misplaced them and rang the bell. For some moments he waited and was about to pull the knob again, when the door was opened—not by her—although she met him in the hall—whether accidentally, or purposely, he could not tell. She had been coming from a room and at sight of him paused. With a start he conceded how her beauty had unfolded, and yet—Mentally he compared the

expression on her face with the expressions on those other faces at the depot and his own countenance relaxed; he smiled grimly, while certain larger emotions, bred in nature's vaster western amphitheater during the past few months, became dwarfed, belittled.

"You are looking well," he said.

"So every one says," she answered, confident, self-poised. "Was your trip successful?"

"Quite!" he answered laconically, and dropped her hand.

"Your telegram came but a short time before your train. We are having a little company to-night. It was too late to change any plans."

"I would not have you do that," he returned.

He now noticed the house was brilliantly lighted; that she was attired in something light, indescribable, and looked fresh, white, with touches of color in her cheeks, like the tints of delicate roses. He felt dusty, tired, with the complexion of a ranchman. Abruptly he turned, started up the stairway, only to experience a revulsion of feeling. Gazing down, their glances met. At first she drew back, so dark was his look, then returned it proudly, almost mockingly. A moment the vision of her slender figure grew upon him.

"You enjoyed yourself—at Newport?"

"Very much."

Closing his hand hard he went on to his room.

Some time later a servant knocked timidly at his door.

"Mrs. Strong wants to know if you will soon be ready to come down."

He responded perfunctorily and in a few moments repaired to the drawing-room where he found assembled a merry company—his wife, Posie, Charlie and the Shadow, Mr. and Mrs. Rossiter and the Reverend Doctor Clement. As Mr. Strong entered, Elinor's face appeared buoyant, care-free; she was talking quickly and every one was laughing. At his coming she broke off in what she was telling and turned to him.

"Excuse my sending word," she explained, "but we really must go in." And as Mr. Strong greeted her guests generally and individually: "People are coming later—a musicale—and if I had known earlier you would arrive—"

"How very reprehensible of you, Mr. Strong, not to let Elinor know," murmured Mrs. Rossiter, as she took that gentleman's arm and moved toward the dining-room.

But behind them Posie tossed her flowery head. "I'm sure Elinor wouldn't have liked it half so well, if she had known sooner. As it was, your home-coming has been in the nature of a surprise, Mr. Strong. You

don't know how pleased she looked when your message came! She really changed color and—"

"Blushed like a bride, I dare say!" And the Reverend Doctor Clement beamed benignly from host to hostess, as the party seated themselves around the board.

"Look at her now!" Posie clapped her hands.

The blood had, indeed, rushed to Elinor's cheeks and for the moment she looked startled; then recovering herself she leaned forward and half-gaily invited the scrutiny of the company.

"Yes; look at her!" she said.

The only persons who did not join in the conversation were Mr. Strong and Charlie Dalton. The latter's countenance wore a conventional expression, but a close observer might have noted how his face had changed at Posie's words and how he had glanced at Elinor quickly. At Mrs. Strong's response, he, too, had involuntarily leaned forward and striven to meet her gaze, but in turning her face from one to the other, as courting a full and individual inspection, she apparently overlooked Dalton. The young man's eyes fell; with one hand he fingered the thin stem of his glass; the other clasped his chair a little tighter.

"You brought back a good color," said Mr. Rossiter, addressing the host of the occasion. "You must have been exposed a great deal?"

"Yes; in the saddle, along the line of construction. For a month I lived outdoors."

"Outdoors!" cried Posie. "How delightful! Of course, you had many adventures. Can't you tell us some of them?"

"I am afraid I can not pose as a hero, Miss Stanton," returned Mr. Strong, his face relaxing.

"I did not know railroad presidents had to work so hard," remarked Mrs. Rossiter, irrelevantly.

"Sometimes through preference, Madam," was the reply. "I had a longing for a breath of the old life—the glory and solitude of God's true world!"

The rector coughed. "Wouldn't you include the cities in that category, Mr. Strong?"

"I hardly think I should call Mr. Tweed's city God's world."

"Of course there are certain evils—"

"Then why not thunder against them in the pulpit?" Mr. Strong's gray eyes shot a half-quizzical glance at the speaker.

The Reverend Doctor Clement changed color. Thunder? In his church? He rubbed his hands gently.

"I fear, Mr. Strong, it would not be in accord with the policy of our congregation. We seek the gradual remedy. A word, a hint! A seed is planted. In time it grows, becomes a bush, then bursts into flower."

His listener did not appear profoundly impressed, and with sparkling eyes Elinor hastened to the rescue of the rector.

"Mr. Strong, I am afraid, believes *always* in radical measures," she said. "Business men, you know, have little time for gradual methods."

Her words to the man at the head of the table rang like a challenge. Doctor Clement sipped his wine, smiled, and was silent. Dalton's look passed from Elinor to her husband. A moment's constraint.

"Depend upon it," said Richard Strong, quietly, "when gradual methods are found effective, business men will find the time."

Elinor turned to Charlie. "How do you like the new figures in the quadrille?" she asked.

"Can't say that I know them," he answered slowly. And then after a pause: "What are they like?"

"Oh, Posie and I must show them to you and Tom."

"Do you dance, Mr. Strong?" asked Posie. He shook his head.

"That is too bad! If you only did, we would insist on taking you to so many 'jams' and 'crushes' this winter."

Richard Strong could not profess any great disappointment and the conversation changed to the consideration of an amateur theatrical performance, and

the fashionable "morning" concerts which were given in the afternoon. Mrs. Rossiter reverted to her favorite topic and expounded on the dawn of the woman's era to the rector across the table while her husband discoursed on the singing at the opera the week before. The dinner, however, was rather hurried, and soon the gentlemen were left for a brief interval to their cigars and coffee.

Perhaps it was the consciousness of being obliged to abridge that usually felicitous period, but now the talk lagged; even a good story from Doctor Clement fell somewhat short of the mark and Mr. Rossiter strove in vain to lend to the occasion an atmosphere appropriate to a proper fellowship in the weed. Mr. Strong smoked steadily; he, however, never hastened through a cigar, but consumed it with unvarying deliberation—except only when the ash did not smoke evenly. Then he usually laid it aside and lighted another. Now the ash was broken, flaky, but apparently he did not notice the imperfection. He was keenly mindful, nevertheless, of his surroundings; of the visual picture—Mr. Rossiter, airy; Dalton, preoccupied; but especially was he cognizant of sounds from without; from the adjoining room—the deep voice of Mrs. Rossiter; the lighter tones of Posie; now another voice, pitched in an intermediate

key—laughing. Quickly he arose. He regretted to leave, but—

“You don’t mean you’re going out?” cried Posie, as he entered the hall. “Your first night in New York and at home after—how many weeks? Elinor—” as Mr. Strong’s wife came forward—“why don’t you persuade him to stay?”

Mr. Strong regarded his wife steadily. She avoided his eyes and her color deepened.

“Persuade a man?” She laughed a little nervously. “*Can* you persuade a man?”


“Indeed you can! Can’t you, Mr. Marks?”

Tom hesitated. “I think the right woman—I—I mean it depends upon the amount of persuasion.”

“In this case I am afraid it would be useless.”

“*Are* you so stubborn, Mr. Strong?” persisted Posie.

“You have it on excellent authority,” he replied as he took leave of the company.



CHAPTER II

CHARLIE VISITS THE GOLD-ROOM

An extraordinary condition manifested itself in the financial world in the autumn of 1869—a state of affairs well calculated to awaken uneasiness, if not apprehension, in the minds of the conservative. This untoward menace to prosperity had arisen gradually and was the outcome of abnormal and artificial causes. Nature, prodigal of her gifts, had done her best to foster the peace and plenty the nation was enjoying. The fruitful earth had yielded unusually abundant crops, and wheat sold for more than it had during the war. But with stores of abundance in sight, the granaries filled like those of Pharaoh, men were deliberately conspiring to precipitate conditions the reverse to those warranted by natural laws. Under pretext of emptying the granaries and moving the grain to foreign soil, the clamor for high gold was heard with suspicious persistency.

It became a regular hue and cry. Men began to talk about it through habit, until by constant reiteration

that which at first had seemed chimerical now was absolute and indisputable to many minds. An inordinate craze for speculating in gold as well as stocks was a natural consequence. People would not work when they could reach into the thin air and by some magical process grasp fabulous fortunes. The clerk deserted his desk; the Broadway merchant, his store; the Nassau Street journalist, his sanctum; the Fifth Avenue dandy, his club—all to wend their way to the affluent Street. The old legends of the Rue Quincampoix and the South Sea Bubble appeared colorless in comparison with the almost daily happenings in the gold-room or on 'Change.

"Buy! buy! buy!" was the frantic chorus. Every one seemed to have become a gambler in gold, and behind this feverish unrest could be felt the influence of an irresistible manipulation, fanning, exciting, stimulating the public.

To a young man of Dalton's keen and comprehensive grasp of an existing situation, the opportunities offered by this trend of events could not lightly pass unheeded. For some time he had seen them. At his desk during the long summer days they had danced enticingly before his eyes, but with a spirit of caution he had continued to wave them aside. Nevertheless, they had persisted in assailing him and after a time he found himself involuntarily repairing to certain places where members of the alleged gold clique were to be found.

Among these temerarious speculators the loud-voiced, irrepressible Mr. Fisk was most conspicuously in evidence, and carefully, quietly, the young man began to cultivate an acquaintance with the partner of Mr. Gould in the high gold movement. He learned of Mr. Fisk's daily routine; where he dined; where he wined; what theaters or bar-rooms he frequented in the evening, and about so often Dalton managed to meet him. The Prince of Peddlers, as Fisk was sometimes called, was approachable; his egotism invited satellites, and Dalton, for the sake of the information he courted, listened to his stories and jokes of the itinerant days when the doughty Jim had driven his magnificent "cart" four-in-hand, and doled out his wares to the unsophisticated farmers of New Hampshire.

In the course of this casual intimacy, Charlie did not ascertain a great deal absolutely, but he divined a great deal. And now with the autumn a big advance in the value of gold seemed as inevitable as fate.

One dull September day of that noteworthy and memorable year, Dalton sat at his desk, thinking deeply. To what did it all tend? A "corner" in gold! A herculean undertaking—mightier than a wheat, corn, cotton or any other "corner"! But the forces behind it—the caliber of the men—their obduracy of purpose—the far-reaching ramifications—

Restlessly Charlie arose; walked a few times across the room; then took up his hat and cane.

"I think I'll go over and watch the boys a little," he told himself, and, acting upon the resolution, left his office and made his way to the gold-room, adjoining the Stock Exchange. It was a gloomy apartment with dingy frescoing, dimly lighted by ten narrow windows through which the sunshine entered reluctantly on bright afternoons and then speedily withdrew as if from an uncongenial place. Numerous "catty-corners" and nooks were fenced off by iron railings or thin plank partitions, and into these recesses the operators were wont to retire waiting for the phantom fractions. A dull murmur greeted the ears of the new-comer, mingled with the clinking of the instruments, spinning out the long ribbons covered with quotations from London, Paris and Frankfort.

For a time Charlie stood near the little fountain in the center of the room, watching the electric indicator operated by a man sitting before a keyboard close to the president's rostrum. A murmur arose from the gallery as the person at the instrument played allegretto, and the scale of prices showed a marked variation in the activity and the spirit of the throng in the vicinity of the tinkling water.

The scene seemed unreal, fantastic; as intangible as

the gold dealt in. This gambling without rhyme or reason, what did it profit a man? If one could only control the trend of prices—that was different; it had been done with railroad and other stocks, but with gold—

Dalton continued to gaze at the indicator. What would it reveal to-morrow?—the next day?—the next?

He left the gold-room as abruptly as he had entered. In a reverie he stood near the curbstone on Broad Street, the while around him sounded the clatter of open-air brokers, pouring out a stream of bids and offers and telegraphing signals with their uplifted digits. Sundry nondescripts who had seen better days flitted by him; ghosts of the past who haunted the Street, always asking the prices and never buying.

“Hack, sir?” said an insinuating voice.

Charlie looked up; then stepped into the vehicle, and named a restaurant. He was yet lost in his ruminations when the carriage stopped at the corner of Fourteenth Street and Fifth Avenue. Entering the far-famed hostelry, he found the lower room filled with the usual number of mellow individuals, calling for brandy straight at regular intervals, and discussing the merits of Erie, Hudson or Pittsburg. Elbowing his way through these perennially thirsty souls, Charlie paused at a little table at the back of the room, gaging his place by the object he had in view.

"Won't you join me, Dalton?"

Mr. Fisk was in his customary seat, and, at his words, the young man glanced in his direction, affecting to see him for the first time.

"Thanks," he said, "but—"

"Sit down, I tell you,"—with a wave of the hand. "Was just about to order and the doctor told me never to eat alone. It's bad for the digestion."

"In that case," said Charlie, dropping willingly into the chair drawn out by the assiduous waiter, "I have no alternative."

Mr. Fisk beckoned to the man. "Bring us first a nervine," he ordered. "Don't know what a nervine is, eh? Well, it's a concoction of roots and herbs, gathered by squaws at Baffin's Bay when the moon is full."

The somber-looking servitor's face was a study; he shrugged his shoulders and looked his dismay.

"In other words, $C_4H_6O_2$!" went on the Prince of Erie. "Haven't got it? Then bring on your whisky—plain whisky!" And as the man with a smile of intelligence vanished: "That's the way I get even with them for their pesky French names."

"A good way," said Charlie, absently.

"Confound everything French—except the women!" went on the buoyant, blond gentleman. "Which reminds me of that day I met you. The time you ran away, you

rogue! You remember it? It was just after your little tussle with Oriental. And do you know what the peerless Zoldene said about you? 'Your friend is ve-ry shy!' 'Not when he's fighting a Dragon,' said I. 'Then he finds poor me more ter-ri-ble than the dragon!' says she. And all the way to the theater she talked about you. Not a conquest to be despised, my boy! She's the rage of the town."

The young man's features did not relax nor did he answer, and Mr. Fisk shot a sharp glance at him; then turned to the bill-of-fare.

"Bring us anything," he remarked to the waiter. "Only in courses—a good long dinner!"

"Perhaps Monsieur would like—"

"Anything! Can't you hear?"

And reaching for his whisky, Mr. Fisk raised it to his lips.

"Here's to high gold!"

"How high?" said Charlie, with an attempt at jocularity.

The other became more metaphorical than definite.

"As high as the loftiest cliff of the beetling Himalayas!"

Dalton forced a laugh. "Can you hold it there?"

"Can we?" He smiled. "What'll they do when we've got all the nuggets, all the dust, all the ingots and all the golden eagles in the land?"

"Except those held by the government!" suggested the other. "And what if the government sells—"

His listener did not reply directly. "Dalton," he said, "the way to have power is to take it. I wanted Erie and I got it."

"Yes," returned the young man, in his voice a certain tribute that the recollections of that memorable fight evoked, "there is no doubt about that. But the government—"

Mr. Fisk regarded the other steadily. "How would you like to do a little work for us?" he asked bluntly. "It isn't much; all the important wires are out; but there are a few people to be kept in line—"

Charlie's heart beat a little faster. The proposal was as unexpected as flattering.

"At Washington?"

"Yes."

The young man reached for a cigarette; rolled it meditatively between his fingers. His first feeling, one of gratification, was succeeded by certain more modest doubts and questionings. A figure intruded itself in the scope of his misgivings—Richard Strong! What subtlety or significance lay back of Jim Jubilee's offer? Did the gold clique desire to give the impression at Washington that Mr. Strong—

"I don't know," began Charlie, hesitatingly, "that I should answer your purpose."

Mr. Fisk seemed to read the young man's mind, and his smile became one of mingled amusement and irony; the pat of his hand more friendly and patronizing.

"Nonsense, man!" he said. "You're just the chap for the work." A moment he studied him. "It's the opportunity of your life."

Dalton looked down. As Mr. Fisk had said, he might never again have such a chance. Why, then, should he not profit by it? If people construed his activity for high gold as a reflection of Richard Strong's attitude toward the yellow metal, why should he, Dalton, be held responsible for the hasty conclusion? But beneath this trend of specious argument, other potent influences moved him. Pride, which of late had been at war with policy, urged him to seize the opportunity to throw off the yoke under which he chafed; to be free, beholden to no one, especially to— Something rankling stirred in his breast. A moment's silence and he raised his head. His bright determined eyes looked into the optimistic ones of his companion; his manner betokened a sudden resolution.

"All right," he said. "I'll do what I can."

"Good!" exclaimed Fisk. "Come around then this afternoon and I'll arrange for you to meet Mr. Gould. Then you'll know just what there is to be done, and—" with a laugh—"what there's in it for you."

CHAPTER III

RICHARD STRONG IS STARTLED.

As the days went by, Mr. Strong evinced more and more a disinclination for his own fireside. The office; his club, a small, quiet organization of business men; the old Astor House for meals—these were the places where his days and evenings were principally passed. His fondness for horses reasserted itself and his handsome roadsters were the envy of the professional followers of the track. In his light wagon he was often seen at twilight time, speeding his brown geldings on the almost deserted road far beyond the noisy precincts of the city.

Absorbed in business responsibilities, he had little time for the consideration of personal matters. He was part and parcel of the systems that he had built; his energy was not his own; the exigencies of the hour claimed him and in taking precautions against the future, he toiled now harder than ever.

But while he thus brought the force of his will and understanding to the task of fortifying himself against

certain conceivable dangers, another storm—not a financial one—was gathering, of which he had no warning. It broke on a certain day, shortly after Charlie's interview with Mr. Fisk. On the afternoon of that day, Mr. Strong felt preoccupied, dull, as a man overworked, yet relentlessly driving himself to his various tasks.

Critically he scanned a number of documents, his thoughts often reverting the while to an article in Mr. Greeley's paper which he had read that morning.

In vigorous, terse language the three great financial storms that had swept over Wall Street within the last twelve years had been briefly described: the crisis of '57, "the fruit of overtrading on a credit basis"; the crash of '61, and the bursting of the bubble in '64, when gold fell forty per cent. and many responsible houses went down. Richard Strong well remembered the last-named occasion and the wreck and ruin it left behind.

"Why did Mr. Greeley publish that article?" he thought.

Then with a sudden energetic movement he turned once more to the papers. Having finished the last page, he folded the documents, tied them with the tape and deposited them in the buff-colored envelope, when Tim, after a discreet knock, entered the room with another consignment of the day's mail. His employer took the letters and handed the clerk the buff-colored envelope.

"Take that to—" and he mentioned a firm of prominent corporation lawyers. "One moment! Has Mr. Dalton come in?"

"Yes, sir. Just come in. He's in his room now, sir."

"I should like to speak with him."

"Very well, sir. I'll tell him." And Mr. Taplin vanished.

Richard Strong glanced at his mail. The top letter caught his eye. The envelope was small, square and blue in color, directed in a feminine hand. A vague, nameless depression, which had seized him earlier in the day, returned. He forgot about the envelope, his properties, the gold crowd. Dalton's footsteps recalled him to himself.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Strong."

"Good afternoon." What had he called Charlie in for? The young man stood expectant; in one hand his hat; in the other an unlighted cigar.

"You wished to see me, sir?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Strong, absently. "How is the market?"

"Feverish," returned Dalton, quickly. "The clique has bought nine millions of gold at one thirty-four or thereabouts. The price has been raised to one thirty-eight."

One thirty-four—one thirty-eight—the figures failed to awaken Mr. Strong's interest.

"You see the report has got out that Fisk has fixed the government," went on Charlie, tentatively.

Mr. Strong glanced mechanically at the letter in his hand, and then bent his gray eyes on the speaker.

"Whom have they—'fixed,' as you call it?"

"All the subtreasury crowd—Corbin—the president—"

The elder man started.

"The president! What president?"

"The president of the United States."

Richard Strong straightened suddenly in his chair; his hand crumpled the envelope. For the moment there was silence; strained, deep.

"You believe that?"

"You don't, sir?"

The other arose from his place and stepped toward Dalton.

"Ulysses S. Grant is an honest man!" he thundered.

A moment he stood, powerful, aggressive, a champion not to be answered; then quietly returned to his desk. The light went out of his eyes; almost a sad expression replaced the masterful look.

"Dalton," he said not unkindly, "you are a young man; an intelligent young man, if you will! You have studied human nature; you know, perhaps, one side of it. But there is another side you underestimate,—the

incorruptible! There are men nothing can change; nothing can affect. Some of them are fools; some of them are only the truly great. I have known such men. In my own humble way I have endeavored to try to be like them."

Charlie did not answer at once. His glance was turned from the speaker. The stillness between them emphasized the sound of shuffling footsteps on the pavement without. When Dalton again spoke his voice was low, constrained.

"The president was the guest of some members of the high-gold party on the boat for the Peace Jubilee at Boston. Mr. Fisk was master of ceremony and—and I presume that is what has made the talk."

"It may be," said Mr. Strong, "these gentlemen would like to accomplish a certain thing. It is equally true, if there be a conspiracy, it will react upon the conspirators. The government and Mr. Grant will do their duty. The government will not stop selling gold for the ostensible purpose of stimulating trade and with the real design of promoting a corner in the yellow metal."

Dalton's lids narrowed but he did not seek further to controvert this emphatic opinion, and again Richard Strong turned to the desk and the letter. With mingled feelings Charlie watched him.

"Is there anything more, sir?"

Mr. Strong swung around in his chair.

"No; I don't think of anything, except—" his face relaxed—"I have never told you, but I am well satisfied with you."

The young man flushed. The gray eyes searched his face with genuine interest.

"It is a great deal," went on Mr. Strong, "to command competent service; it is more to feel confidence in those about you. I have confidence in you, Dalton; I like you, and speak frankly."

Charlie's face grew a little whiter. He strove to reply in words, but only bowed.

"You want to make money, but—don't try to make it in gold. It's a dangerous and an unfair game. Leave your future to me and—I will do all I can for you."

More than a trace of embarrassment and some other indefinable emotion crossed the young man's countenance.

"Thank you," he half stammered.

For the moment the quixotic idea entered his mind of stating there and then to Mr. Strong his desire to leave his employ. But quickly following it came the thought, what reasons could he give? He could not now specify his connection with the gold clique; to do so would be to violate his understanding with them. Nor could he

define that other reason—the stronger, more personal one.

“Thank you,” he repeated, “I—”

He was not sure what he had been about to say, but Mr. Strong stopped him with the gesture of a man who desires no words of thanks for what he sees fit to do; opened the letter in his hand and began to read. Suddenly his face changed. An exclamation from his lips caused the other to pause at the door.

“What is it?” said Charlie, surprise momentarily mastering that other feeling.

Mr. Strong’s back was to him, but Dalton saw the great fist clenched on the desk.

“What is it?” he repeated.

The hand unclenched; turned here and there among the other papers.

“Nothing,” said a strange voice; “nothing!”

A moment Dalton lingered dubiously. Then—“All right,” he said, and went out and closed the door.

But when he had gone Richard Strong again reached swiftly for the letter.

CHAPTER IV

A FIGURE IN THE MOONLIGHT

He read it again and again, after which he sat and looked at it, as if his mind, usually so clear, had suddenly been confronted with something incomprehensible. What did it mean? What could it mean? A nameless writer—

With his firm fingers he tore the missive and the envelope into bits and threw them into the waste-basket.

"It is not worthy of a second thought," he told himself. "I'll not think of it."

But he did, nevertheless; even though he turned resolutely to his papers. He read some matter foreign to the letter that had disturbed him, and when he put the business paper down, he found he had perused it like an automaton, without mastering its contents. Still he strove to concentrate his thoughts on the details of the day, and taking up a pen began to write. The first few sentences flowed concisely, but he was soon groping for the main thread of the idea and obliged to commence once more. He got farther—not much—when suddenly

he bent his head and held it in his hands. For some time he remained thus, but at length arose.

"This will not do," he said, and walking to the window, opened it wide, and stood there, breathing deeply. On the pavement below were little groups of men, engaged in earnest conversation. What were they all talking about? The man at the window knew there was but one topic of interest now for layman, or churchman; poor man, or rich man. Gold! high gold, or cheap gold; a gold corner, a gold slump!

Impatiently he turned and left the room. Passing through the general offices, he traversed the hall, pausing a moment before Dalton's room. That young man had some time since betaken himself from his place of labor, but his door was ajar and Richard Strong looked in. His desk had been cleared of papers, but the odor of cigar smoke still permeated the air. Mr. Strong took in the various details at a glance, lingered a moment and then walked down stairs and out of the building. Turning into the street the first person he encountered was a little cadaverous, bearded man, with deep, sunken eyes, who slackened his nervous footsteps at sight of him.

"How do you do?" he said and, with no further word, walked on with Richard Strong. The street was now fast emptying itself of its frequenters; messengers,

clerks, brokers, lawyers and tipsters; some moving directly toward the main thoroughfare; others diving into certain subterranean places whence came the sound of a banjo, or a fiddle, or even the fuller strains of a distressed small orchestra.

"The short interest is very heavy in gold," finally observed the little man.

"So I am told, Mr. Gould."

That gentleman said no more; it had ever been his habit to examine and cross-examine men with his eyes rather than his lips. Mr. Strong had always been impenetrable, but he wore now an indefinable look which puzzled the little man. Did it portend he had been selling gold heavily and felt himself bound to compromise with the Erie party, which was manipulating the market?

"Strong looks worried," Mr. Gould remarked later in the day to Fisk when they met at their common rendezvous, a certain little back office.

"Well," laughed Jim Jubilee, bruskly, "there's only two things that worry a man in this world—gold and women!"

His companion did not answer directly. A certain moral side of Mr. Fisk's nature fell within the pale of his absolute disapproval. Mr. Gould was devout, temperate, and above all, domestic. He might use the other;

employ that versatile gentleman in many and varied capacities, but the strong puritanical streak that ran through the little man's character shut out Jim, the erstwhile peddler, from an intimacy any closer than the exigencies of business demanded. Mr. Fisk made money, to employ it in vain pleasures; Mr. Gould, like Daniel of old, worshiped both gold and the Book.

"The short interest must be nearly two hundred millions," remarked the little man, and turned the conversation to the sober and staid topic of the circulating medium and the government.

Meanwhile the subject of the little man's thoughts continued to walk up-town. Near the post-office he stopped and bought a copy of the *Journal of Commerce*. He endeavored to read the headings of the articles as he walked along; to note the last quotations for gold and the comments thereon, but in a few moments threw the paper aside. He asked himself where he was going.

His home? No; not there! The picture of a dancer, conspicuously displayed near the entrance of Niblo's caught his eye. "The incomparable Zoldene!" read the announcement. A line of people near the box-office was an eloquent tribute to that fascinating lady's drawing power.

In the picture a net fastened her hair; with one foot raised, she balanced herself on the tip of the other, the

while a ravishing smile parted her red lips, as if it were an exhilarating and delightful feat thus to maintain the difficult equipoise. The pink slippers and a red rose-bud were the most striking features of her costume, and, with the smile, carried conviction undoubtedly to no inconsiderable part of the public regarding the verity of the managerial announcement. Beyond the widely opened portals—suggestive of the alluring attractions of a Zoldene lurking somewhere within, and a yawning capacity to accommodate as many of the curious-minded as cared to investigate said charms—Mr. Strong moved on, turning into the Metropolitan Hotel.

In the lobby a merry group of actors, wearing English “scow shoes” of the largest kind, were engaged in the consideration of—not brother players—but stocks and sherry cobblers.

“Erie — gold — forty — three-quarters — sell—buy—thirty days!” was the burden of their talk, another straw indicating the trend of events. The leading man no longer remained content to play Claude Melnotte, or Romeo, but must needs divide his attention between the muse and the market. Mr. Strong paused long enough to light his cigar, and then resumed his walk.

Before a solid and stolid-looking edifice—his club—which he reached some time later, stood a light vehicle and a spirited team. Without stopping for dinner, he

entered the wagon, grasped the reins, and not long afterward was speeding along the almost deserted road, his favorite drive beyond the turmoil of the town.

Gently were falling the shadows of evening; tranquillity lay on the land, and peace on the placid surface of the majestic river. The wood-robins sang in the trees, and, somewhere in the bushes the plaintive whippoorwills mourned unseen. All the assuaging forces of nature, however—the hush of the river, the halcyon touch of twilight, the pacific chant—failed to dispel his unrest. He held the reins with no answering thrill to the superb movement of the fleet-footed team, and soon the horses relaxed, jogging along with tossing mane and coquettish by-play. But after covering a short distance, with no sign of reproof from the inattentive driver, they were stirred once more of their own accord to a sudden rush of speed, as behind sounded the patter of hoofs, and, creeping up, came a light road wagon.

The man in front had no choice; a free stretch of road lay before him; the air rushed by, cooling without clearing his brow. The team behind did not gain, but hung on his flank with dogged persistency. So it continued a fair distance, until Richard Strong with some difficulty drew in his horses and suffered the other vehicle to pass.

“Good team!” called out a voice. “You should enter the Jerome Park races.” And Robert Bonner sped by, holding the reins over Peerless and Flatbush Maid.

After one or two ineffectual attempts to regain the distance lost, Mr. Strong's horses reconciled themselves to their master's mood. The shadows grew deeper; over the river, night placed a veil; through the chasm swept the wind. Now not far before him shone the bright windows of a rambling, hospitable-looking structure. Near the porch stood the editor-sportsman's team, surrounded by a number of admiring bystanders, critically inspecting the horses in the lamplight. Mr. Strong's hand held the reins indecisively. Should he go on? Should he stop? The sound of merry voices in carriages drawing near—a light-hearted party of town-folk—decided him. He flicked the horses lightly with the whip.

Several hours later, when the road lay in brightening haziness and over the trees the edge of the moon peeped elfishly, he returned, reining in the team before the rambling house.

"My! but you have been driving them, sir!" said the stable-boy, who appeared from around a corner of the wing.

Mr. Strong regarded the lad, half-kindly, half-dully, as the latter stroked the moist neck of the nearer horse.

"It won't hurt them, my boy," he said. "Horses and men are none the worse for a little driving occasionally. That never hurts them. But take this"—thrusting his hand in his pocket—"and see that they are well rubbed down and blanketed."

Entering the wing, he seated himself in one of the small private rooms. Long he remained there and smoked. No; he did not care for anything, he said to the waiter, and then, possibly reflecting that he would attract less attention with the viands before him than sitting in purposeless abstraction, he told the man to bring him cold meat and ale. Now, as so many times before that evening, his mind went back to the letter; its words seemed burned in fire on his brain; how diabolically ingenious had been the message; how keen the train of suggestion; and the inference—

The waiter's entrance caused him to look up, and, as he did so, he became aware of the music of an orchestra in an adjoining part of the house; a light rhythmical strain, suggestive of gliding feet and inspiring motion. The man deliberately arranged the dishes.

"Is that all, sir?"

"That's all." Something in the music seemed familiar. Where had he heard it? Then he remembered. It was one of Elinor's favorite waltzes; a breath of Vienna gaiety. Mr. Strong was not one of those who believe that music is the "fourth great material want of man," but he had listened, perhaps, with unconscious interest to that particular play of exhilarating melody.

"You have a dance here to-night?" he said to the waiter.

"Yes, sir; quite a party! It has become all the fashion in town to give Eclipse parties out in the country. This is eclipse month you know, sir. So we have Eclipse polkas, Eclipse waltzes and Eclipse gallops. And Eclipse dresses, I guess, too, for each lady looks as if she were trying to eclipse every other lady! Would you like to just look in at them, sir?"

"No."

The guest's tone left no pretext for the man to linger. When he had gone, Mr. Strong showed little inclination to eat of the abundance invitingly spread before him, for after a moment he put down his knife and fork and sat back listening. Capricious, illusive was the music, suggesting vistas of life he had never penetrated; vistas of youth, pleasure—

A sudden desire to look into the room seized him and quickly he arose, when with a last flaunting whirl of sparkling cadence, the melody resolved itself into the final chords. He paused at the door of his room; returned to the table. A hum of voices and a flow of laughter succeeded the strains from the orchestra—evidences of mirth and merriment which oppressed the listener.

This was her world—a world to which he was a stranger. He wondered where she was now; what she was doing. Had she gone to an assembly? A musicale?

The theater? Was she laughing, too, like all these other women? He remembered how rare and sweet he had thought her smile the first time he had seen her. He recalled, too, her eyes, so deep, frank and true; the inflexible grace of her girlish figure where all that was best seemed to find a fair and equitable abiding-place. Through the confusion of his thoughts, the trust that her glance inspired then—her glance, and her grave face, shorn of its lighter character when he had addressed her—recurred to him. One phase of her nature had appeared as fixed as the brightest and clearest light of the most steadfast star in the sky. He had never doubted; he did not doubt now—

But the writer of the accusing letter? the object of the epistle? What foul motive had inspired it? How had such enmity been incurred? It had not been a man's work—obviously! A woman's then? A devil's!

Abruptly the orchestra broke in upon the trend of his questioning, and the voices of the merrymakers were drowned in the catchy harmony of the latest polka. The man at the table left his place and walked out into the passageway. A current of air called his attention to an open door and he found himself moving up and down the broad veranda built on the front and side of the main part of the structure. Approaching one of the windows, he stood against the rail and looked in.

The heavy lace curtains and the lambrequins almost obscured his view, but he could dimly discern graceful and sprightly figures in ceaseless motion; broad flowing silken gowns, giving varied touches of bright hues to the animated scene; colors that intermixed, vanished, and then were seen again! He experienced a vague consciousness of picturesque head-dresses; arrangements in ivy leaves, roses, wild flowers. He saw strewn on the floor, where they had fallen from the dresses of the heedless votaries of pleasure, several garlands of gay buds and blossoms which now the lively feet either thrust aside or trampled upon.

One figure, he could but half-discern on the other side of the room, he almost fancied might be hers; a tall form instinct with grace; the white shoulders, rounded, albeit girlish. She was moving with all the abandon of a joyous spirit, when her dainty slippers caught upon a garland of flowers upon the floor. She tripped, recovered herself, tore the blossoms ruthlessly apart, and with a laugh swung again into the vortex of figures. As she did so, the watcher left the window.

The clock had some time past marked the midnight hour; the maids had long been yawning in the kitchen and the stable-boys dozing in their chairs when the party broke up. One by one the carriages drove away with their blithesome couples, many of whom carried their

laughter far down the road. The last pair crossed the porch; there was a brief vision of some one assisting a white figure into the vehicle; a passing scent of the flowers she wore—and the Eclipse dance had come to an end!

Then Richard Strong, who had ostensibly been reading a magazine in the secluded little room next to the bar, laid down the periodical, looked at his watch and started.

"Bring out the team," he said.

"All right, sir," answered the sleepy-looking waiter with alacrity.

Soon the horses were at the door, and, after settling his bill, he sprang into his carriage and turned city-ward.

Brightly shone the moon, a silvery disk well up in the sky, and, as he sped down the road, the details of the surrounding scene were plainly discernible—the top branches of the trees, now motionless; the bushes, grotesque in outline; the road, white and winding. The soothing sound of myriad insects mingled with the reassuring notes of the little owl, a cheerful tinkling like that of a bell. Perhaps some of the peace of the hour descended on him. Perhaps the beauty of the night, the soft glamour that lay on hill and dale, threw over him their magic spell. The one central thought became paramount.

"She is to be trusted—trusted!"

That was something—a great deal. Yes; thank God for that!

"Trusted!" he repeated almost tenderly, when suddenly the glimmer of light, bathing two figures in a carriage he had unconsciously almost overtaken, arrested his attention. A little streaming veil caught his eye; held it. He thought of the lady whom he had likened to his wife; the indistinct, vague outline of the girl who had danced in unrestrained enjoyment.

A growing fear came over him; an abrupt dread, akin to acutest pain. He knew why he had unconsciously associated the lady with Elinor. Because she was Elinor—and she now rode before him!

He was assured of this; as certain as that he knew who sat by her side; as certain as he saw him bend over her; swiftly draw her to him—kiss her again—again—

CHAPTER V

ELINOR SITS UP LATE

Just what happened immediately thereafter Richard Strong never quite knew. The first blinding sensation which paralyzed every nerve was succeeded by an overpowering sense of what had happened on the road before him. The hand clutching the whip he had half-raised to his throat—the gesture of a man who is choking—suddenly stopped; descended fiercely, brutally! The maddened horses sprang forward; became uncontrollable; dashed down the road and passed the other carriage, almost grazing it. Startled, Charlie Dalton gazed after the runaway team, but with no suspicion of the greater danger he for the moment had escaped.

How long did Richard Strong struggle with the horses? How did it happen he managed to elude destruction? He was conscious of having experienced several narrow escapes; of having overtaken and passed other vehicles. But at length he succeeded in checking the headlong speed and drawing the panting and af-

frighted team to a nervous gait. He became, also, aware of feeling now a deep-settled numbness, different from the emotion of that first outbreak. Gazing back, he peered into the gloom and saw nothing; listening, he heard nothing. He wondered how far they were down the road; how long he should be obliged to wait.

But for an accident and he had already acted. He knew that he should act now, if he remained, and yet was powerless to resist the primal human impulse that held him to the spot. He even feared they might not pass that way, but at the fork take the other road leading into the city. This apprehension grew into disappointed assurance as time sped on, and he saw no signs of them. He left his wagon and restlessly strode up and down beside it; now looking at the sky, where a sickly, yellowish impress marked the position of the moon behind the clouds, and then down the silent, deserted road. The horses, quivering and trembling, required no attention from him, but remained willingly at a standstill.

During this vigil his mind, now, over-vividly acute, passed in review many events that were suddenly illumined with new meaning. The reason for her confession that day at Saratoga became plainly manifest. She had told him she did not care for him. But she had not added that all the time in her mind had been another figure; in her heart, another image!

And she had married him, knowing it! She had stood before the altar and pledged herself to him, conscious of it! To what end? And Dalton? A bitter exclamation burst from Richard Strong's lips. He and she!

The unmistakable sound of carriage wheels broke in upon his mood and fixedly he gazed in the direction of the approaching vehicle. He realized fully what he was going to do. He did not consider how he should bring about the desired end, but he knew he could not fail.

Nearer drew the carriage and he moved out into the road to meet it. How slowly it approached! He breathed harder; the interval became interminable. At his feet a katydid began its cheerful song. The vehicle was now but a few feet from him; a fierce joy beat in his breast. The patter of hoofs grew louder, and Richard Strong had stepped forward when a strange voice called out. The unfamiliar tones arrested his action, held him as if paralyzed. The person who drove up was alone.

"Hello, there!" he exclaimed, as he brought his horses to a standstill. "Break-down?"

The motionless figure did not answer.

"I guess you're the runaway team. Need any help?"

"No." The word was forced through his lips.

The whip cracked and the carriage moved on, leaving the man in the road staring after it. On him fell the bitterness of the reaction. Still he lingered, but heard

no sound save the persistent incongruous note of the minstrel in the grass. At length, he got into his wagon once more and continued toward the city. Against the gathering mistiness of a sullen sky the distant lights gleamed faintly, but a number of houses, now scattered along the road, were dark as if tenantless.

The town which he presently entered was wrapped in murky shadows; the stillness reigning in the streets was broken only by an occasional wandering footfall—some belated frequenter of the billiard rooms, the gambling houses or the Atlantic Gardens. Melancholy as the night, a woman in tatters emerged noiselessly from the lowering shade around the corner of one of the narrow highways, passed on beneath the yellow flare of the lamp, and specter-like glided into an abyss of obscurity.

The horses must have turned homeward of their own accord, for the driver was hardly conscious of guiding them. They had stumbled on somehow, their spirit gone, and at last paused before the great mansion. As he drew up, the coachman who had been waiting in the barn came forward, and led the team to the stable. Mr. Strong admitted himself into the hall.

It was dimly lighted, as also the library, and he gazed quickly around him. She had already returned. A light wrap, a tissue of delicate web and mesh, lay on the chair; beside it her gloves; upon the floor, her veil. He glanced

at these various articles, but especially at the bit of diaphanous stuff at his feet. Once more he seemed to see it fluttering in the moonlight.

From an adjoining room, her portrait looked down on him. Painted by a friend of the Rossiters not long before the marriage, it had been removed from the family homestead at the suggestion of the ever solicitous Mrs. Rossiter, to adorn a conspicuous place on the walls of the mansion provided for the bride. The canvas caught his attention, as perforce through some living attribute; the eyes rested softly on him with real and positive insistence, a dewy light in their shadowy depths. The mocking quality of that psychological analysis in paint possessed him. So fair! so sweet!—it—she—all was deceit—guile—

A step overhead broke the deathlike hush of the house. Mr. Strong left the hall and slowly mounted the stairway. At the landing he paused; a tiny glimmer of light shone from beneath her door; drew him irresistibly toward it. He counted his footsteps; heard his own heart beat. Strangely he hesitated at the door. What was he going to do? Turning the knob quickly, he entered the room.

A slender figure, still in the ball-room gown, sprang up from the sofa as he crossed the threshold. The lights were turned half-down, but the whiteness of her dress

and the paleness of her face made her vividly discernible. At her feet and clinging to the folds of her skirt were the red petals of a rose from the garland she had worn. Dark shone her eyes, but behind the startled look tears seemed to gleam. She stood there for a moment, one hand raised to her heart, as if to still its sudden quick beating, then gazed down.

"You are still up?" he said.

"Yes—I was at a dance—out of town."

As from afar he studied her.

"You—enjoyed it?"

"Yes."

He moved a little nearer.

"Is that the reason you have been crying?"

"Crying!—how do you know?—why—" She tried to laugh. "I suppose—all of us—sometimes—have our blue moments," she ended defiantly.

"Is that the only reason?"

She stroked her gown.

"Of course! What other reason could there be?" she asked, lifting her head.

Her tone was light and yet strained.

"Of course—there could be none," he returned.

She looked at him quickly; an expression, almost of relief, crossed her face. Again she seated herself upon the sofa.



"Who went with you?"

She breathed quickly. A flush mantled her cheek.

"Cousin Charlie," she answered, her eyes very bright.

His face changed. Intently she watched him. Suddenly her eyes dilated.

"Oh," she cried, "it was you—on the road—behind us—"

Something seemed gathering in his brain—a mist. He took a step forward.

"Yes—it was I—"

"You know—you saw—he will not see me again!"

The mist spread. Her eyes looking truth, and her lips speaking lies, overwhelmed him. As through a dark cloud he saw her in the moonlight; on the road; in Dalton's arms—

"Richard, I—"

"The truth! The truth!—you sold yourself to me! You love him!"

"No!—no!"

Spots of color danced before him. "Confess, or—"

He put out his arm. She laughed wildly.

"Well? Well?"

His hand closed. A deeper film was drawn over his gaze. He was no longer master of himself.

When the mist cleared he saw her, pale, passive, lying on the sofa. Stupefied, he regarded her. Why did she remain motionless? What had happened? Was she—

Automatically he turned up the light. In the full glare, her face was whiter; more death-like. Her golden-brown hair, unbound, swept the pillow; her hand dropped from her side. He looked at it—so inert!—then fell on his knees by the couch.

“Elinor!”

No answer; only the closed eyes and the still face! A thrill ran through him. Guilty or innocent, he was terrified by what he had done.

“Elinor! Elinor—”

Her breast lifted; then her eyelids.

“Thank God!” he said, and dropped her hand. What power had stayed his strength? Surely he had meant—some miracle seemed to have happened.

“Elinor!—”

At the sound of his voice, mechanically she drew herself from him. Why was he bending over her? A moment before the dimness of the room had been succeeded by darkness, while now—

“Well?” she said, as a third person speaking.

He did not answer; his glance dwelt upon the brutal marks of his hands upon her shoulders—stains of red upon the snowy whiteness.

“Well?” she repeated in the same tone.

Unsteadily he arose; turned.

"I hate you ! hate you !" she said.

"I know that," he answered, and with no further word walked to the door.

Her eyes followed his receding figure, but he did not look back. The door closed ; the sound of his footsteps soon ceased. Long she sat staring at the floor. Without, the cold, gray dawn cast its first lengthening shadows down the quiet street ; in the park a bird began to sing.

It seemed to arouse her. Going to the dressing-table she caught sight of herself ; her shoulders—then suddenly sank to the floor and covered her face with her hands.

CHAPTER VI

THE WRITER OF THE LETTER

The next day Tim Taplin noted, with some apprehension, his employer's face, its expression that of a man spent with fatigue. He observed, also—what surprised him more—the usually steady hand of Mr. Strong was not without a tremor. The clerk's solicitude overcame his diffidence.

"I trust you are well, sir?" he ventured to inquire.

"Quite well." The eyes that looked into Taplin's were cold; the voice hard, discouraging further interrogation.

The quaint, ingratiating smile faded from Tim's face; in his heart, perhaps, he sighed. What had come over his employer? Formerly he had volunteered an occasional query of a personal nature—about the clerk's domestic affairs, or his sister, Tillie, to whom Tim was bound by ties of unalterable devotion! But for some time both Tillie and himself had ceased to exist, as human beings, in the mind of the financier. Tim had become a machine; Tillie—alas!—had been obliterated.

"Has Mr. Dalton come down yet?"

"Yes, sir—and gone."

Richard Strong's glance was so strange and searching, the clerk shifted uneasily.

"He was down very early," explained Tim. "He didn't somehow seem quite himself, and after fidgiting around for a few moments called me to his desk. 'I've got to go to Washington again, on some personal business,' he said. 'It's unexpected, but necessary. Will you tell Mr. Strong?'"

"How long did he say he would be gone?"

"For a day or two."

"Very well. That's all."

Tim went out wondering. Could the young man's departure for the capital city have anything to do with Mr. Strong's altered demeanor? The Street was rife with rumors; the day had dawned more feverish than yesterday; the dreaded whisper of impending failures and tottering financial institutions tended still further to increase the lack of confidence that the public for some time had experienced. In railroad stocks a further weakness became observable; in gold, the unnatural buoyancy increased.

"Depend upon it," the clerk told himself, "Mr. Strong is worrying about some of his securities." And Tim returned to his work, shaking his head dubiously.

For three days Richard Strong practically confined

himself to his office. With such energy as he could command he applied himself to the pressing affairs of the moment, knowing that the public weal—his public—demanded of him then, as perhaps never before, the exercise of unceasing vigilance. His nights he passed at the Astor House in a room on the second story of that comfortable hostelry. He had heard nothing from his wife; ~~he had sent her~~ no word.

But amid these public cares he could not entirely shut himself from matters of private moment. Passing through the hall one day he encountered a lady at the door of Charlie's office; a dark lady, glittering with jewels and redolent of flowers as a May-day queen. She smiled sweetly and spoke with a French accent.

"Do you know if Mr. Dalton is in?"

It was seldom a woman's footstep passed the threshold of these offices and Mr. Strong surveyed this unusual caller not without surprise. Perhaps his regard was more persistent than flattering; perhaps she instinctively felt the repellent force in his glance, for her smile became a shade less agreeable. But she was a woman not easily daunted in her purpose and her voice had a more determined ring as she repeated her question.

"He is not."

The lady's face expressed disappointment. A moment

she looked thoughtful, as if confronted by an unexpected contingency, and then—

“When, please, will he be in?” she asked.

“I can not tell.”

The lady tapped her foot.

“How annoying!” she said, and added, with a sudden sharp flash of her black eyes: “I am his wife.”

Mr. Strong wheeled about.

“His what?”

“His”—tilting her head—“wife.”

The gentleman made no answer; only looked down. With gleaming eyes the lady watched him, as if enjoying the situation. Would he question her statement? Apparently not.

“How long have you been married, Madam?” he said at length.

Zoldene shrugged her shoulders. “I am no longer—the bride. The honeymoon”—with a sigh—“it is all over—long ago!”

The fact, not the sentiment with which it was embellished, interested her listener. Critically he studied her.

“You are an actress?”

“An *artiste*, Monsieur!” corrected the lady. “They call me—Zoldene!”

“And are playing in town?”

“Oh, *mon Dieu!*” cried the caller. Have you not heard? Zoldene—the talk of the town!—*mon Dieu!*—”

Upon the other, these expostulations did not, perhaps, produce the expected effect, but if he expressed no pleasure in meeting a lady so illustrious and popular, his manner at least was shorn of a certain cold expectancy, which at first had marked it. Opening the door of Charlie's office, he ushered her in—a courtesy that she acknowledged with a smile once more wholly amicable, ingratiating. Not without interest she gazed about, touching her finger to the dust on the desk and eying askance sundry ponderous-looking law-books.

“It is not—a very pretty place,” she said.

Mr. Strong reverted to that other topic of interest.

“It is not generally known, Madam, that Mr. Dalton is married,” he observed.

“No,” answered the lady; “after he left the college, he expected the fortune, but—it was gone. I am not *mercenaire*—*mon Dieu*, no!”—with a sigh—“but one can not live on the air. So I return to Paris.”

“When were you married?”

A smile rippled the lady's face. “When he was at the college. All the sophs—what you call 'em?—were in love with Zoldene. He come every night; he send flowers; he try to ‘cut the others out.’ He say he love me; I laugh. *Mon Dieu!* Zoldene belong to the art, not to the man. The last night there was a little supper; we were—what

you call it?—*très* jolly. Again he say he love me. And I—'No! no!' But he persist. We order more champagne; and some one then, he 'dare' us to go to the minister. 'No! no!' say I, and then he tell me how he love me. And then—"

The lady paused. "It was so romantic, and he—he love me so—"

"And you went to the minister's and were—married?"

Zoldene's head nodded. "For better or worse, Monsieur!"

Mr. Strong offered no comments. He had no reason to doubt the story. In fact, at that moment his mind was not bent upon questioning the lady's veracity. A different train of thought moved him.

"Mr. Dalton, as I told you, is not here," he said, "but if you would like to write something, you can leave it on his desk."

"A note—just the thing!" cried the lady, a malicious light in her eyes. "It will give him so much pleasure!" And she began to draw off her glove. "Where is the paper?"—seating herself. "Ah, here! And the pen? *Mon Dieu!* the pen, it sputters. What shall I say?" The little hand traced a few lines; the head tipped one way to survey it and then the other. An envelope was directed with equal celerity and the lady arose.

"There!" she exclaimed. "If Monsieur would give that to him. Monsieur has been very kind. Monsieur—"

The words died on Zoldene's lips. She regarded Richard Strong with a start as she realized her mistake. He was staring at her note, studying intently the handwriting. Then he turned from the letter to her. A frown gathered on the lady's brow; her eyes snapped angrily.

"I will not write him after all!" she said. "A note? It is nothing. I will call again."

And she held out her hand for the letter. Still the other showed no disposition to relinquish it.

"The note, Monsieur!" spoke up the lady, sharply. "I will have it back."

Quickly he thrust it into his pocket. Her face changed and she tossed her head.

"You are very clevaire."

"Why did you write that other note?" he said hoarsely.

She drew herself up, no further dissimulation on her face.

"Why do you think—a woman writes a note like that?" she answered. "I met him on the street—he ran away from me. I write him; he will not answer. Maybe I wanted to go back to him. It was not my fault I must leave him before. But he would not listen and then I see him with another, in the park; at—"

Richard Strong opened the door, whereupon she

paused, hesitated, but something in his face caused her to pass out. Beyond the threshold, however, she turned; her eyes looked unutterable things.

"That is it," she said. "Just like a man! I do you the favor. I open your eyes to your wife. This is how you thank me."

And with a vindictive little laugh, she was gone.

CHAPTER VII

BEFORE THE BATTLE

On the afternoon of the third day, Mr. Dalton returned to town, and, dusty from his journey, presented himself at the office. To Tim Taplin, whom he met at the door, he absently confided the fact that the trip had been a tiresome one and asked if Mr. Strong was in. The chief clerk replied that he was, but that a meeting of the bank directors was being held and would probably be in progress for half an hour. Still, if Mr. Dalton desired to communicate with Mr. Strong immediately—

“It doesn’t matter,” replied Charlie, quickly, an expression almost of relief crossing his face, and turned toward his office. He lingered there but a short time, however, glancing over his mail. He soon pushed the letters impatiently aside and got up; for a moment he stood leaning against his desk; then reached for his cane and walked out. At the St. Nicholas he stopped and stepped to the bar. His lips felt dry and the cheerful clinking of the ice in the glass had a grateful sound. He sipped the cooling beverage mechanically.

"I tell you they hold the market in the palm of their hands!"

"Nonsense! The heavy crops—the increasing foreign demand for our securities—"

From the hotel and the ever-flowing loquacity of the bar-room speculators, Charlie made his way to his rooms, a suite of apartments not far from Madison Square, which he shared in common with Mr. Marks, and there he found the faithful Tom in waiting. That gentleman grasped his hand cordially, with many inquiries as to his journey, to which Dalton responded briefly, if not curtly, and threw himself on the sofa. The Shadow lighted a pipe, which he drew from his pocket, and surveyed the other with a good-nature that soon, however, became mingled with friendly solicitude.

"You look a bit done up, Charlie."

Dalton laughed shortly. "I feel it."

Tom shook his head. "Take it easier, old chap!"

Charlie lay back, stared at the ceiling; then regarded his satellite in a peculiar manner.

"Tom," he said, "have you ever been driven by a single desire you couldn't shake off; a mad desire that masters you; makes a slave of you?"

Mr. Marks looked startled. "I suppose—you have been speculating again," he returned, vaguely and apprehensively.

Dalton laughed oddly. "If it were only that, Tom!"

The other's face furrowed; he held the pipe more tightly in his hand; stared at it with a frown.

"I don't mind telling you," went on Charlie, after a pause, "that I've been under a devil of a strain. A devil of a strain!" he repeated half-absently. "But if I win, I win out big. If I don't—" He brought his hands together—"but it's got to go; got to! It can't fail."

"What can't?"

Dalton did not reply; only stretched himself nervously, and Tom arose.

"Charlie," he said, "I don't like it—on my word, I don't!" It was a vigorous protest to emanate from the Shadow, but it seemed lost on the empty air. Mr. Marks strode to and fro. "It sounds too much like plunging!" he added, stopping suddenly. "As if failure meant too much; more than you ought to risk!"

"Risk!" Dalton regarded Tom with a scornful start. "What do I care about the risk? If you had started with my handicap,—" he broke off abruptly. "When a fellow's got a millstone, he's got to rise or sink by no gradual process."

"What nonsense are you talking now?" Tom's honest eyes shone with genuine bewilderment.

Charlie clasped his hands beneath his head. "Nonsense! Yes; that's it," he said.

Mr. Marks watched him a moment. "You're done up," he said. "Better take a nap, and I'll sit here with my books and my pipe. That will be like the old days when I had to grind to pass the exams and you could do it taking it easy. That was after you jerked me out of the creek. Couldn't get rid of me, so you had to take me in out of charity. Remember, old boy?"

Mr. Dalton did not respond; for some time he lay without speaking, his bright, restless eyes belying the immobility of body; then raised himself on his elbow.

"Seen—Miss Stanton since I've been away, Tom?"

"No," replied Mr. Marks, immediately beginning to puff again at his pipe.

Dalton sat up. "Lend me a hand, Tom. I'm dusty as a tramp and must soon be off."

Half an hour later Charlie again swung out into the street and up Broadway. Ordinarily mindful of what was going on around him, Dalton in the present instance paid little attention to the bustle and stir of the thoroughfare. He had eyes neither for the women with flounces and parasolettes wending their way in carriages to Weller's for a pastry or a sandwich, nor for the trim maids wearing prismatic hats. Even a shop-window, resplendent with the snowy orange-blossom, the crimson cactus and the regal passion flower, failed to attract his casual glance.

At the square where stood the Strong mansion, which he presently reached, he paused, hesitated, and then turned into the inclosure. His face changed a little as he mounted the steps; he seemed to experience some difficulty in finding the card which he handed to the maid that answered his summons.

"Mrs. Strong is ill and has not seen any one to-day," said the girl.

"Ill?" He looked down. "Perhaps, if you took up my card—"

The maid turned and went up stairs and for some time he continued to wait.

"Mrs. Strong will have to be excused."

The voice of the maid broke in upon his thoughts. Charlie drew his gloves more snugly upon his hands; moved with deliberation toward the door; paused.

"It is rather important I should communicate with Mrs. Strong," he murmured vaguely.

And taking a note-book from his pocket, with hand somewhat unsteady, he scribbled a few words on one of the pages, then, folding the paper, he handed it to the girl.

"Give this to Mrs. Strong."

The maid took the note. How long was she gone? When she returned, she gave him an envelope which, with an assumption of carelessness, he thrust into his pocket.

"Tell Mrs. Strong I hope she will soon be herself again."

In the square he glanced back at the house. The shades were half-raised, but the heavy lace curtains fell behind with obscuring effect. The pensiveness of the sky, and the sinking sun shining through a haze of sullen September mist, lent a depressing background to the scene.

Turning the corner, he quickly opened the envelope; scanned the bit of paper that fell out:

"I should like to see you very much. There is something I must say to you. If not now, when may I come?"

For a moment Dalton stared at it; then slowly tore it into bits. It was his own note returned unanswered.

With flushed face he stood there, indecisive, nervously tapping the curb with his cane, then beckoned to the driver of a public carriage at the entrance of the inclosure. The man, dozing on his seat, by some perception of an additional sense appeared cognizant of the proximity of a fare, and awakening his cob, drew up to the curb with an air of fine expectancy and readiness.

Dalton hesitated, glanced at his watch, and with a start recalled an important meeting.

"The Fifth Avenue Hotel," he said, and entered the dilapidated vehicle.

At the hotel in question, a keen observer might have noticed the peculiar actions of sundry individuals who had entered the lobby by the side entrance at divers times during the last half-hour. A little man with a black beard came in quietly and, stepping to the clerk, put a question to him in an undertone. Upon receiving the answer, he moved carelessly across the hall, and, entering a door which was opened opportunely on the other side, found himself in the car of the "perpendicular railway," as it was then called, that intersected every story.

No sooner had he been whirled out of sight than a large man with a bulldog face appeared, lighted a cigar and strolled up and down. He was joined by another gentleman, with a cast in one eye and a shrewd if not benevolent countenance, but these two persons separated almost as soon as they met. Shortly afterward one of them sauntered leisurely up the stairway and the other got into the "new-fangled" car of the upright railway. Several other men strode cautiously into the lobby and, without show of precipitancy, were conveyed or conveyed themselves upward, to where, in a large room in a secluded corner, Dalton some time later found them all assembled.

The little man with the black beard looked over the company, locked the door, and opened a box of cigars.

"The caucus will come to order," he said—and then, in a terse, businesslike manner, went on at once: "There's only twenty-five millions of gold in the city. The short interest will have to settle to-morrow."

"You think the time has come?" The man with the bulldog face snapped his jaws aggressively.

"To-morrow! to-morrow! to-morrow!" returned the little gentleman, with a growing emphasis. "Are there any objections?"

No one answered. "That point then is settled," said the speaker, crisply.

"Are you sure of Grant?" asked the man with a cast in his eye.

The little gentleman turned to Charlie.

"What does Corbin say about that?"

The young man passed his hand through his hair; he looked around quickly, as if recalled to a sudden sense of his surroundings. The little gentleman repeated his question.

"That the president will stick," answered Dalton.

"Corbin ought to know," said some one. "He's related to Grant."

He of Jubilee fame stroked his ponderous mustache. "I'll answer for the president. He has written Boutwell to sell no gold. The executive fiat has apparently placed the treasury of the United States where it can not spoil

the deal. Besides," he added, with an ugly look, "if he fails us, he knows we'll so compromise him—"

The little gentleman laid his hand on the other's arm. A sharp, stern look— "There's no talk about compromising."

The other laughed. "Well, the safest plan, after all, is to keep the president out of the way, and I guess while he's at Newport, we've got him safe."

Comprehensive nods greeted this declaration and the caucus had turned to the vital consideration of ways and means for carrying out the campaign of the morrow, when something white, surreptitiously thrust beneath the door, arrested the attention of the company. A moment's silence fell over all; then the little gentleman arose, picked up the slip of paper that had so mysteriously appeared, and opened it. Even his mask-like features expressed a trace of feeling.

"What is it? Read it out, man!" cried Fisk.

"Grant has left Newport."

Mr. Fisk swore softly. "Lemme see it," he said, and, clenching his cigar tightly between his teeth, examined the message. "It says that, sure enough," he continued. "Yes, and the writing's all right—" Abruptly he paused. "I know who sent it. But where has Grant gone?"

"To Washington, no doubt," commented the little gentleman, thoughtfully.

"Then he must have become suspicious?"

"Not necessarily. At any rate, he can't know to-morrow is the day we have fixed upon."

"But he'll soon learn—to-morrow," was the significant response.

"That's just it. We must telegraph our friends there; have him intercepted or met at the train and—got out of town. Grant must not be in Washington to-morrow," he announced determinedly.

"But how can he be intercepted, or got away?" asked a dubious voice.

"That is the problem," said the little gentleman, with a saturnine smile, "to be solved."

The members of the caucus looked at the floor, the walls, the ceiling, rather than at each other.

"Eureka!" blurted out Mr. Fisk, suddenly.

All turned, regarding him inquiringly.

"There's Denham. Just the man! He's a good friend of ours and an old war comrade of Grant's. Grant thinks a good deal of him. He is just now sick, dangerously sick, at his home near Clarksville, not far from Washington. Now if we could get a telegram from him to the president, asking Grant to stop off—"

"Can it be worked?" asked the man with the cast in his eye.

"Anything can be worked," said Jim Jubilee, brusklly,

"provided you know how to work it. And by the eternal!" he added, "we'll work this and the corner, too."

"Unless Richard Strong and the gentlemen he has induced to join with him in a pool to oppose us should prove an obstacle," remarked the man with the bulldog face, ironically.

"How about that pool, Dalton?" said Fisk. "Anything new?"

Charlie moved uncomfortably. "I don't know of anything."

"You think, though, Mr. Strong really means to stand in the way?"

Again the young man seemed to answer reluctantly. "I am sure of it."

"Well, then, let him look out for the Juggernaut!"

The little gentleman arose. "I believe that is all," he said. "The caucus is dissolved."

At about the same hour some one tapped gently upon the door of Mr. Strong's room at the Astor House. In answer to the occupant's response to come in, a darky entered.

"Gentleman send you dis card, suh," handing him a sealed envelope.

Upon the card which Richard Strong found within

was written a single line, evidently something of moment, for he started perceptibly.

"Any answer, suh?"

"No."

The darky vanished and Richard Strong, after a brief consideration, placed the card carefully in his pocketbook and without taking his hat, left the room. As he walked down the hall he scrutinized the numbers on the doors, finally pausing at the end of the corridor. Apparently he found the number he sought, for at once he knocked. The door was opened by some one within and Mr. Strong stepped across the threshold.

"How do you do, sir?"

A short, bearded man, to whom his appearance was evidently not unexpected, greeted him.

"Excuse my troubling you, Mr. Strong," he said, extending his hand, "but when one is in doubt, he seeks what he regards as authority."

Mr. Strong's answering grasp was as firm as the other's was cordial. "A request from the president of the United States," he replied, "is a command. But I did not know you were in New York, Mr. Grant," he added.

"Nor do I want it known," answered the other. "I was on my way to Washington and thought it best to stop over here. But won't you sit down?"

"Thank you." Mr. Strong took the chair offered him

and silently awaited the president's further pleasure. The latter did not speak at once, but sat for some moments in profound thought. When he looked up his manner was troubled; the black cigar between his lips seemed not to afford him that consolation he usually found in the Indian weed.

"Mr. Strong," he remarked tentatively, "it is much easier to direct the movements of an army than to solve the financial problems of peace."

To this remark, which seemed put out at a venture, the visitor replied in kind. "Perhaps because there is no peace in the world of finance," he said.

The president regarded the speaker steadily. A less reserved person would have come to the subject uppermost at once; but Grant was ever content to approach his goal with care and deliberation. He studied the man before him, noticing the suggestions of power and reserve in face and figure which were so largely his own heritage.

"Mr. Strong," he said at length, "it has been repeatedly represented to me that the prosperity of the country depends upon the government's stopping the sale of gold."

His listener made no answer and Grant waited a moment, then rose and walked over to the table.

"What do you think?" he asked bluntly.

If the president had been slow in reaching the query,



the other seemed in no haste to give him the response he desired.

"The prosperity of the country depends on many things," Richard Strong returned circumspectly.

Grant took the cigar from his lips.

"Good!" he said. "I like a cautious reply. But tell me more definitely what you think."

"It is not so much what I think as what you think."

The president's face became grave, earnest.

"Many persons on the Street are not so averse to withholding their confidence," he replied. "If I do but turn a corner, one of them runs into me. If I go to Newport, I meet them in the sea. Is it accident? They are all of a mind; all patriotic! You are about the only person on the Street who has not sought me. Although Corbin told me that you—" He paused a moment. "What you may tell me I shall be very pleased to consider."

It was a long speech for General Grant to make; he whose taciturnity had become proverbial. At its conclusion the other arose likewise.

"Thank you," he said simply. For a few moments they looked into each other's eyes. Then the ghost of a smile crossed Richard Strong's face.

"Mr. President, I have always known what you would do, when you had thoroughly looked into the matter. I know now what you have no intention of doing when the

time to act arrives. You are not going to withhold government gold from the market for the purpose of enabling certain unscrupulous manipulators to get control of and to maintain a corner on the metal."

Over Grant's features came a trace of surprise. Had he entirely expected this answer? Certainly it seemed to please him.

"Mr. Strong, I should not have liked to have had you opposed to me in the Wilderness. You have too shrewd an intuition."

"Intuition!" said the other. "Perhaps. But I know President Grant, and, when it comes to a vital issue, he will investigate for himself, decide for the right, and 'fight it out on that line if it takes all summer.'"

Again the president pressed the other's hand. "I am obliged to you," he said. "I am glad that your views are in consonance with my own, although," he added thoughtfully, "I was not exactly prepared for it. I got from Corbin some sort of an impression to the contrary." Richard Strong's eyes shot a look of quick interrogation. "Perhaps the presence of some one from your office—Mr. Dalton, in Washington—had something to do with it."

Mr. Grant caught the expression on his listener's face and paused. "You did not know?"

"I did not."

It was with an effort that Richard Strong, after a short silence, spoke again.

"I knew Mr.—Dalton had been in Washington. I did not know, however, that he had affiliated himself with the gold clique. I regret you should have drawn any inference of my mind—from his presence there."

The president's face darkened. A moment he smoked ominously. "You will hear from me, Mr. Strong," he said at length. And then at the door: "Good night. I am very glad to have had this interview."

As Richard Strong stepped again into the hall, a man who had been skulking at the end of the corridor, watching the door of the president's room, wheeled abruptly and walked quickly away.

CHAPTER VIII

BLACK FRIDAY

A miscellaneous, tremulous host had congregated on New Street, shouting and gesticulating. Before long, every entrance to the Exchange became so blocked by the still-gathering legions, that strength and patience were required by him who desired or found it necessary to work his way through the press of people. Business became stagnant; merchants left their offices and apprehensively repaired to the scene of strife. What had happened to values? What did it mean? Tampering with gold; speculating in that precious commodity had precipitated an alarmingly unsettled condition, which might reach disastrously from one end of the land to the other, and—

“The country is going to everlasting smash,” was the general verdict.

To the conservative man of trade, it is true, this answer seemed far from satisfying. He had been enjoying good sales and reaping rich net earnings; with the wheels of industry all humming, wreck and ruin seemed unreal,

uncalled for. Yet here was chaos; values had run mad, and financial institutions were tottering. Small wonder he felt at sea; lost; groping in the dark.

Before the opening of the gold-room, the announcement had gone forth that the yellow metal would be advanced that day to two hundred. This startling statement sent the color from the cheeks of the anxious bears, and they regarded one another as if they knew their doom had been sounded. At eleven o'clock—a foretaste of what seemed in store—gold had gone up almost twenty points, and the ranks of the opposition showed many signs of demoralization. Before the fierce aggression of the attacking party, the weaker defenses were carried and only the old campaigners yet stood by their guns exposed to the cross-fire of those fatal buying orders.

“What ish it now?” A frantic Israelite caught at the sleeve of a broker.

“One hundred and fifty.”

“*Mein Gott im Himmel!*” And the Hebrew fell back in a faint.

Fiercer raged the fight. “Buy!—buy!” sounded the unvarying note of the coterie.

At the same time confidential brokers of the gold clique, under flag of truce, quietly began to confer with the enemy, advising unconditional surrender or the alternative of a further inflation of values, until the dread-

ed two hundred mark was reached. In the face of this threat, many belligerents threw down their weapons; wended their way to the headquarters of their assailants, accepted the terms offered, and mournfully departed from the scene of battle. Others, however, of a sterner, more martial mold, yet elected to remain on the field and fight.

Standing near the fountain, Dalton watched the exodus of certain of the enemy. In his hand he held a slip, containing his instructions from the clique, which having been fulfilled, gave him a moment for pleasing contemplation. The din was like a huzza to his ears; a triumphal discord of a battle whose end was no longer a matter of doubt. His face was burning; his hand dry and hot, and he dragged it in the basin of cold water without being conscious of a reactionary sensation.

“Won!”

Like the soft arpeggios of a harp the water tinkled, and he looked down into it to see his own face.

“Rich! Rich!” the reflection seemed to gibber back at him, pale, worn, yet glorying, Narcissus-like. Around him were other white faces but in their eyes was despair. With a consciousness that he sat upon a pinnacle of power far removed from the brunt of wreck and disaster, Dalton contemplated the losing host. Vaguely he wondered why a messenger did not bring him further instructions. Were the clique relaxing their efforts? No;

other brokers, who, he knew, were identified with the high-gold party, had not ceased to operate. The sight of Tim Taplin's face in the crowd gave him something of a start, but smiling, self-possessed, he faced that gentleman.

"Mr. Strong is still selling, Tim?"

"He has been selling all morning, sir," answered the clerk, in a low tone, "as you must know, sir."

Dalton's features grew rather pinched. Frequently, as the exigencies of business had demanded, he had appeared in that room in the past. Railroads, banks, moneyed institutions were connected with it by wire and, in common with these men who were not in any sense speculators, Richard Strong had need of a daily supply of gold. That Mr. Taplin should consider him still agent of his employer was not to be wondered at, and Charlie made no haste to undeceive him.

"I think Mr. Strong is much worried," went on Tim, cautiously. "He had set his heart on stemming this movement, or conspiracy, and now—"

"It's likely to swamp him," said Charlie.

"It looks as if it would swamp anything," murmured Taplin, gloomily, as he glided away.

A moment, perhaps, Dalton's face showed a trace of compunction, but if so, another emotion replaced it; a sentiment akin to greed, avarice. He looked about him

more impatiently, when suddenly the room seemed to whirl around. He steadied himself at the fountain rail and smiled. Faint?—nonsense! Then he remembered he had not eaten that morning, or hardly touched food the day before; that he had been living on his nervous energies. Now after the supreme moment he found them failing him.

“Ridiculous!” he told himself, and, straightening his frame, looked at his watch. There was a lull in the storm and he hesitated.

“Safe enough to leave, I guess,” he thought. “Anyhow, I’m going.” And as he passed out, “One hundred and fifty,” the last quotation he heard, was eminently reassuring.

Without, such pandemonium had not been witnessed before in the Street since the days when the patriots threw down the statue of King George and cut off its head, or when they marched to Trinity to compel the rector to stop praying for the king and the royal family. Now it was not a work of art the throng sought to demolish, but certain members of the “Erie crowd.”

“That’s one of them. I saw him with Fisk.”

In the midst of this disappointed host, Dalton found himself, his torn coat and bent hat bearing testimony to the difficulties he had experienced in elbowing his way through the gathering. He was conscious of a painful

throbbing of his temples; of an impression of the surrounding scene, vague, indeterminate; of hearing plainly the uproar, yet feeling himself in an indefinite degree remote from it.

Oblivious alike of angry glances or muttered threats, the young man walked on. The fresh air revived him; he wanted to be alone, in some place where he could think. Pausing irresolutely, the door of a basement restaurant, not a stone's throw from the center of disturbance, caught his eye, and, descending the steps, he entered a small grimy room. It was not the kind of resort he was wont to frequent, and now, in his new-found opulence, the sawdust floors, the sooty walls, appeared especially incongruous. But he was hungry, weary, and minded neither the character of the frequenters nor the quality of the steaming lunch that was being served. He even felt quietly amused, as, seating himself before a greasy table, he took off his hat and began nervously to fan himself. He looked straight before him; the golden profits were all there; tangible, firm. Again he saw the chimerical fractions dancing before his eye; once more pursued them.

"Gold—gold," he repeated. With gold all could be bought. All save—

A shadow crossed his face, but the buoyancy of the

moment dispelled the passing cloud. Why despair—that day nothing seemed impossible—there were ways even to the most shining goal.

“Reg’lar dinner, sir?”

“Anything, and a glass of sherry.”

The man made some irrelevant comment and vanished. Still Charlie continued to review the events of the morning. His contract with the gold clique assured him a certain portion of the profits, which in the aggregate already could be figured in the millions; besides which, he had operated a little for himself as well as for his associates. The sum total accumulating to him made a showing altogether satisfying. He repeated it several times. The figures were exciting, stimulating. Not less pleasing was the accompanying thought that he could now sever all connection with Richard Strong; terminate the false position in which he was placed.

Mechanically, at first, he began to eat; then with appetite. Horn-handle knives, pewter spoons—all were one to him. The stew had a flavor Delmonico’s lunches had lacked; his color came back; his heart began to bound. The strident tones of a news-vender broke in upon his thoughts, and, beckoning to the lad, he bought a paper, hurriedly glanced over it. In the leading article a few sentences caught his eye. “They have tampered with the government * * precipitated a cataclysm * * the gold-room is doomed * * its walls will topple.”

Scornfully he put by the paper; let the editor rail and rave; they—the gold crowd—must expect a certain amount of opprobrium! What did it matter? People always threw stones at success; at the same time, they never failed to bend to it. Abuse and worship strangely intermingled. The golden calf was at once an idol and a target; and so it would always be!

Charlie laughed; he opened and closed his hands as if to test the strength of his fingers; then pushed back his chair. The clock told him he had been absent a little over a quarter of an hour.

“Wonder how high it is now!” he thought, and, rising, left the table, dropping a piece of silver into the hand of the expectant waiter as he passed through the door.

The movement of a crowd of people on the sidewalk at first carried him with it, but soon he escaped from the tumultuous stream.

“Burn them out!”

For a moment Charlie stood and watched the throng as it swept on toward the offices of Messrs. Gould and Fisk.

“Now what good will that do?” thought the young man. “What fools people are when they lose their heads! All the same”—Charlie shrugged his shoulders—“I shouldn’t care to be there when they arrive.”

And turning, he again darted into a doorway and re-entered the gold-room.

CHAPTER IX

NOON

"Mr. Dalton is buying gold, sir," said Tim Taplin as he entered the office of his employer that morning.

Mr. Strong glanced up from his desk.

"He seems to be acting for the clique," went on Mr. Taplin, in a puzzled tone. "I don't understand it."

"Has he been here to-day?"

A negative response and Mr. Strong looked down. The young man's trips to Washington—the "personal business" to be attended to—there seemed little room for doubt how Charlie had been occupied at the capital city! Mr. Strong recalled, too, Dalton's remarks about Fisk—Grant—

"They say the president has been sequestered by the clique, sir," went on the clerk, anxiously. Richard Strong wheeled around in his chair. "The Street is full of the rumor that he was on his way to Washington, but was lured away to a small place remote from telegraphic communication. There's a story about an old friend

who was dying and Grant's being induced to stop off. And now he couldn't order the sale of government gold if he wanted to—at least, that's what they say," added the clerk, deprecatorily.

Mr. Strong made no response, but his face had grown serious, and for some time he did not move, sitting with his eyes fastened on a single point, as if seeking the heart of this new and unexpected difficulty that had arisen to complicate a situation already sufficiently involved. If the report was correct, the president's apparent inaction at a time when the country was threatened with a crisis, could be understood. He had intimated he would act; he had not acted. Was it because he could not act? It seemed incredible he should thus have been put out of the contest, and yet Richard Strong knew the subtle and devious contrivances of which the clique were capable; the resources they had at their command, and the lengths they might go to attain their purpose.

But to have practically abducted the president of the United States!

"General Grant started for Washington yesterday afternoon," said Mr. Strong, suddenly. "Use the wire and find out if he reached there."

While waiting the confirmation of this talk of the Street, he could not but speculate what would be the result of even the report of such a *coup* on the part of the

clique. What effect would this tremendous news have upon values; what moral influence would it exercise upon the members of the pool Richard Strong had organized, and which was already struggling against formidable odds?

He was soon to learn. Toward noon several of them sought him with doleful countenances, intimating a desire to withdraw from any further community of "short" interests.

"It's suicide not to," they said.

Richard Strong did not gainsay this statement.

"The clique have offered to settle; why should we not save what we can?"

"Why not?" he answered.

"Then you, too, will compromise?" they eagerly asked.

"I?" The veins stood out on his forehead. "No!"

"But with Grant in the hands of the clique, remote from telegraphic communication, what hope is left? You will be ruined."

"I do not know," said Richard Strong, "just what hope is left, as you term it, but I know I am committed to one course. For my part, I do not believe General Grant is a man lightly turned from his destination or his purpose. I know such a statement, unsupported, is unsatisfactory. For myself—and this will sound equally reasonless—I can only say there are exigencies wherein a

man acts in a certain way because he can not act otherwise. Call it obstinacy, suicide, what you please; you are free to withdraw."

Which they did, and Mr. Strong continued to throw over securities to the waves without quelling them. How many millions had the pool he represented traded in? The total transactions of the gold-room were already close to the half-billion mark. Even he could not but begin to feel appalled by the magnitude of the trading; figures had come to mean nothing; sober calculation had run riot and anarchism was the result.

"One hundred and sixty!"

He had walked into the adjoining office and was listening to the telegraph instrument that connected with the gold-room.

"Sixty—sixty-one—"

His eye followed the flying fractions. When would he hear from the capital city? He began to experience impatience over the delay in procuring authentic information; intolerance at thus being obliged to grope in the dark. But the news came at length:

"The president is not in Washington."

It was true, then; indubitable; a fact! That Grant had been decoyed away he could no longer fail to believe. Simultaneously with the confirmation of this rumor, came the noisy expression of a startling announcement:

"The gold corner is complete! The gold corner is complete!"

Several voices at first were crying it on the thoroughfare below; the turbulent crowd took it up; their tones pierced the air. Mr. Strong looked at them angrily. Could one believe such harbingers of evil; sheep that bleated one after the other?

"Impossible!" he said, folding his arms, as if with a word he would dispose of the matter.

"The gold corner—"

He closed the window, but he could not shut out the memory of the faces below, or exclude entirely the noise of outside tumult. A sharp, quick sound at his elbow soon, however, arrested his attention. Click! Click! The metallic beating of the soaring quotations pervaded the office; it seemed in consonance with the throbbing of his temples. He strove to think of what should now be done; if he had left anything undone; but the futility of his own efforts came over him like a revelation. A feeling of surprise mingled with his other emotions; that Grant, the great strategist on the field of battle, should have been overcome by the machinations of the gold crowd! The honor and integrity of the chief executive he never doubted; Grant's enemies he knew would offer harsh criticisms; the country would talk, but Richard Strong only experienced disappointment; regret.

"A telegram, sir!"

Absently Mr. Strong took it, opened it. It had been sent from a little town not far from Washington. Whom did he know there? Suddenly his eyes flashed as they caught the name of the sender. The president—the message was from him! Mr. Grant might be sequestered, but he was not isolated. Quickly Richard Strong scanned the contents; then turned to the telegraph instrument:

“Gold!—one hundred and eighty—”

Was it too late? Would the president be able to intervene only after the injury had been done; after the corner had been actually consummated? These thoughts crossed his mind as he rapidly indited the message.

“Send this at once,” he said to the telegraph operator. Then turning to Tim Taplin, he added shortly: “Sell ten million gold at the market.”

It was a culminating command; a final effort to arrest for the moment the upward trend of the metal. Even as he gave the order, he knew that possibly the battle had already been fought and won by the gold crowd; that he was, perhaps, only committing the last of his treasures to the deep.

While waiting, he was strangely calm. Panoramic glimpses of the hard and arduous struggle, his life, floated before him. Could it be that all he had attained could be swept away at a breath? A fragment of one of Mr. Beecher’s sermons came to his mind: “A man is rich according to what he is; not according to what he

has." He thought it strange he should think of that now.

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"You will find me at the gold-room."

As Mr. Strong with these words passed out of the office and down the corridor, Tim Taplin, who had just come in from the Street, looked after him gloomily.

"The pool has failed! It will have to settle with the gold crowd!"

On every hand expressions of this nature had met Tim's ears, and now, as he stood at the corner of his desk, leaning his head on his hand, they repeated themselves in his mind. For the first time his confidence in his employer had suffered a rude set-back; already upon the very walls he seemed to read the fatal handwriting. He felt himself as the small actor in a great drama, an inseparable part of the rapidly unfolding dénouement. Absorbed for some moments in these mournful ruminations, lost to his immediate surroundings, he did not hear the door of the office open and shut.

"Is Mr. Strong in?"

Tim looked up with a start to perceive a young woman, tall and erect, whose clear eyes were fastened upon him. Where had he seen her before? Suddenly an indefinite impression became definite. At the church; walking toward the flower-covered altar; very beautiful, very proud; very cold—as she seemed now!

"No; he isn't in, Mrs. Strong," Tim hastened to reply.

"When do you expect him?"

"He did not say—and it's hard to tell—this has been a terrible day on the Street—" Disconcerted, the clerk's voice died into indefiniteness.

The widely opened eyes continued to interrogate him. Fragments of a conversation overheard in the 'bus recurred to her: "Some of the most prominent men in the country will be wiped out—are going to the wall!" That meant losing their fortunes; their money.

"Is Mr. Strong much worried?"

Tim hesitated. "Mr. Strong is, of course, very anxious; he has staked a good deal to-day, but—" Tim's reservation was almost guiltily checked and he ended by looking dejectedly away.

The silence grew as she studied him until Tim, with an effort, again spoke:

"It may not be so bad after all, Mrs. Strong," he said, and raised his eyes to her face when he suddenly became aware of a change in her.

The proud coldness had been touched by a sudden radiance.

"As Mr. Strong is so busy and so worried, I won't stop and trouble him to-day," she said. "You need not even tell him I was here."

A moment she smiled bewilderingly at Tim; then moved toward the door.

CHAPTER X

THE END OF THE DAY

As Charlie again entered the gold-room and strode forward to the indicator which marked the trend of values, that instrument showed a slightly reactionary movement. Whence came it? What new undercurrent was moving? The young man first looked surprised; then frowned and turned to watch the swaying throng, the frenzied faces. The strain he had been under at the beginning of the day was renewed; became an unnatural tension. He strove to throw it off.

"Pshaw! It's nothing. A point or two—what's that?"

But when emphasized by another! He stood as a man in a dream; he seemed unlike himself; moved hither and thither in a chaos of thoughts. Could it be possible—was it possible that the clique had begun to lose its grip? Again he felt the need of more adequate instructions from headquarters. What was the matter with the controlling spirits? Apparently he was forgotten; lost sight of in the swirl. At a loss, he began once

more to buy cautiously when suddenly, "Sell!— one-thirty!" came from his left, while at almost the same time, "Buy!—one-sixty!" shrieked the piercing voice of a Fisk broker from the other side of the room.

A feeling of consternation assailed Dalton. What sort of chaos was this? The gold crowd, made overconfident by their early triumphs, seemed now to be fighting without plan or organization. He saw his profits—the fortune he coveted, vanishing like a puff of smoke.

With a confused consciousness he endeavored to "cover" his own holdings. They were absorbed, but to his dismay, at widely-varying prices, as the adverse movement made itself more manifest. Charlie again paused; leaned against the wall, and, taking a pad from his pocket, began to figure, his usually lucid brain experiencing unwonted difficulty in the simplest calculations. Oblivious of his surroundings—the sound of strife, the clamorous multitude—new hope sprang into his breast; renewed confidence in his leaders.

The check was but temporary. Certainly there had been no federal interference; the clique had been left to its own devices; under the circumstances, they must prevail in the end. With the assurance, came another thought. What did Richard Strong think of his president now? An honest man? Perhaps, but a tool—

All at once a great shout resolved itself into a chorus of voices that spread far and wide.

"The government is selling gold!"

Like a thunderbolt the news struck the Street.

"The government is selling!—selling!—"

The gold coterie stood aghast. Grant intervening to thwart their plans? Impossible! The exultant voices of the opposition dissipated any uncertainty or lingering doubts.

"Down with the traitors!"

Many of the victims of the raid recovered their strength; those who had been crippled forgot their wounds and sprang into the lines, animated by but one purpose.

"Death to the wreckers!"

Like the terrible recoil of a bursting wave propelled by storm and tide, the waters of vengeance and fury swept back upon the conspirators. They saw their doom coming; felt themselves being swallowed up; carried out beyond their depth. Yet feebly they struggled.

"Rogues! Rascals!"

Around Charlie, men seemed fighting in a cloud.

"Curse you, Dalton!" said an angry voice at his elbow.

"What do you mean?"

The distorted face, looking into his, slowly resolved itself into that of Jim Jubilee; but the young man, like one who has exhausted emotion, felt alike indifferent to that gentleman's condemnation or approval. He did

the strangest thing possible for him to do—the thing he least felt like doing—and smiled.

“I beg your pardon,” he said.

“Oh, I don’t suppose you knew that Richard Strong saw Grant here in New York and that when we thought the president was all right, Strong managed to reach him with a telegram! You didn’t know that!”

Charlie started. So Richard Strong had turned the tide of the day’s battle, after all! By what power or influence with the president? It did not occur to Dalton to question the veracity of Fisk’s statement, or to ask regarding the source of this unexpected information.

“You stood by us to a certain point and then—damn you!—you sold us out to Richard Strong,” resumed Fisk.

“Would you believe me, if I denied knowledge of the telegram, or of any meeting with Grant?”

The other responded with a brusk and emphatic negative. . . .

“Then I won’t deny it.” And Dalton turned from the angry tool of the Erie coterie.

His throat felt on a sudden dry and sore; he looked for a moment upon the sea of faces, the moving arms; a tumult of excited voices seemed to draw him toward a vortex.

“One million at thirty-five—thirty—”

It was Mr. Strong himself who spoke. Dalton did not

even start as he regarded him. He, too, was pale; between his brows was a deep furrow.

"Two million at thirty—three million—"

Money was now loaning at two hundred and fifty per cent.

Charlie Dalton glanced up at the clock. How slowly the pointers moved! He breathed deeply; a certain exhilaration seemed wearing off; he was awakening as to the after-effects of an opiate.

"Brooks and Brown have failed!" "Burton, Jones and Company have gone under!"

Amid the uproar he felt an unnatural numbness; a deeper consciousness of the perversion of things. Methodically he acted now; almost against his will.

"Alden, Marks and Belden are swamped!" "Marsh and Burton, engulfed!"

Other eyes than his were furtively regarding the clock. Never before had the iron indicators so lagged in their task of marking off the minutes. A common longing seemed to fill the minds of all—the desire for relief from the tension—to witness the close of the day! No matter what the end might show; waste or havoc; disruption or disorganization—it would be welcomed as a lull in the storm. Suddenly

"Trinity bells, with their hollow lungs
And their vibrant lips and brazen tongues,"

began to ring. Clear, penetrating notes amid the tempest, the reverberations were carried far and wide.

"One—two—three—"

The day was over! The Exchange closed until tomorrow. Men wiped the perspiration from their brows. At last they could look around, take their bearings, and bury their dead!

Like a man dazed, Dalton made his way from the room. Occasionally he lifted his hand to his brow and pressed it there; his fingers were icy-cold, but something hot seemed burning into his brain. The day—what had it brought for him? The whole affair had been a miserable, tremendous fiasco. Still he walked toward the office of the clique; possibly some one there could hold out a straw for the morrow. Four stalwart policemen guarded the door; a hooting, jeering mob circulated about the building.

"I should like to go in," said Charlie.

"Can't," replied one of the quartet of burly sentinels.

"But I have personal business with Mr. Gould."

"Lots of people have to-day," answered the man, with a chuckle. "But he ain't at home to callers. When he saw them—" jerking his thumb at the crowd—"coming, he just made for the back door, down the alley, and I guess he won't be back to attend to business to-day."

Dalton stared before him a moment, then turned mechanically and walked away.

CHAPTER XI

THE MASTER OF THE SITUATION

A dark, dreary, rainy day! But men walked, unmindful of dampness or gloom over the field of battle. Where the contest had occurred, the vicinity of the gold-room, the scene resembled a Golgotha—a place of skulls—and people of all classes and conditions came to contemplate, if not to mourn. Lawyers, of a speculative rather than litigious turn of mind; clerks that had lost their positions; merchants now out of trade, jaundiced and panic-stricken Israelites; visitors from the rural districts—all served to swell the throng that once more packed the sidewalks of Broad Street.

Innumerable burrows, or basement offices on Wall or William Streets were now closed and deserted, and their tenants, the "human woodchucks," hovered on the outskirts of the gathering, timorous, awed, ready at any moment to frisk back into their holes. Young men with old heads looked older; the Oily Gammons wore a mask of suffering. A number of bubble companies had exploded with scarcely a "pop," and many bankers

and brokers spawned in over-gorgeous panoply, were wiped out in a breath.

With face like that of a Roman senator, set and firm, the rugged commodore strode into the street and walked toward his office. But a few days before, he had been driving with his fair bride of six weeks; bowling along, care-free in his light wagon, drawn by two blood trotters. Now, perforce, he turned from the solace of the myrtle to the aggravations of finance, exchanging the true lover's knot for the entanglements of the market. Behind him came another figure, bent, old; moving with difficulty, as if scarcely able to bear up beneath the weight of broken fortunes and years. As he clattered and shuffled along with the assistance of a hickory cane, the burden of his thoughts found trembling utterance:

"Frisky boys!—didn't gold bile?—Lord—Lord help us!"

Pausing before the office of Richard Strong he stood wagging his head uncertainly for a moment, then slowly began to mount the steps. The destination of many others that morning lay at the place of business of that financier, for when the smoke of battle had cleared the day before, it was discovered that Mr. Strong, as chairman of the pool organized to preserve normal conditions, held in his grasp the control of the situation. Yet at what a risk he had gained this mastery none knew but him-

self. Had Grant not become, after reaching the bedside of his comrade, suddenly distrustful of the zeal of his friends and of the influences that had been brought to bear upon him; had he not thereupon resolved for his own peace of mind, to telegraph immediately to Washington to get the latest news of the situation, the gold clique would have succeeded. Then it was Grant had made the disquieting discovery he was twenty miles removed from telegraphic communication. At once he had acted with great promptitude, his suspicions thoroughly aroused, and calling for a conveyance, he had driven post-haste to the nearest telegraph station, wired to Washington and to Richard Strong.

The strain of Black Friday, however, had left its impress upon the face of Mr. Strong. His expression was that of a seafaring man who had brought his vessel through a crisis and now would fain leave the bridge. But there was yet work to be done.

In the outer hall Uncle Samuel, with quavering accents, asked to see the financier.

"Just say it's Mr. Brewster and—he's come to settle."

For some time the old man—he who had once directed the destinies of great "pools" and "corners"—was kept waiting without. He twitched in his chair uneasily and often raised his hand to his wrinkled forehead. About him sharp-faced boys with messages appeared and

disappeared. Regarding him curiously, the clerks nudged one another.

"That's Uncle Sam'l!" "The Ursa Major!" "The Old Bear!"

In his day how many men had danced attendance at his beck and call! Now he, himself, had become a patient loiterer before the offices of others. But oblivious alike of the attention he attracted and of his surroundings, his thin lips continued to mutter in aimless fashion: "It was like the old days in Rock Island and Southern—when we squeezed 'em both ways—"

"Mr. Strong will see you now."

Uncle Samuel arose, followed the speaker and a few moments later stood in a doorway, leaning on his cane and blinking a little in the light.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Strong?" In the shadow he dimly divined the countenance of a man near the window. "I've come to settle." Again he wiped his glasses, adjusted them. "If I ain't mistaken, you're master of the situation." As he spoke he rubbed his withered hands. "Master of the situation!" he repeated, and seemed to sink into a half-reverie.

"Well, sir?"

A short, implacable voice caused him to straighten suddenly.

"What's your price?" said Uncle Samuel, in accents he endeavored to make equally hard and incisive.

Time was when the shrewd old miser driving a bargain presented a formidable figure, but now his tones, despite the ancient habit of cut-and-dried bartering, betrayed a wavering weakness and anxiety.

"I cal'late you kin dictate," he went on. "'Tain't much, this time, though! Since you cleaned me out before, my credit ain't been the best."

"What do you expect?"

The old man rubbed his chin reflectively. The conspiracy of the church recurred to him forcibly; the part he had played against Richard Strong.

"I don't expect nuthin'," he answered. "No; 'tain't mercy I've come for"—with a rough gesture—"only to settle!"

A question; Uncle Samuel shifted his cane; his face became more twisted, seamed and furrowed.

"Why did I buy? It was on account of a note I gave the little church at home. It had come due and they wrote me. It seemed like a chance for me to make the money to pay the note before—but 'tain't no use giving reasons. The little church can't realize on that—"

His voice drew to a close; he leaned his chin on his cane. Perhaps in imagination he heard the comments of the country folk of his old home: "Uncle Samuel gave to the Lord and then took it back again. He let his note be dishonored."

The old man clasped his hands. "I've been a niggardly, grudgin' old critter," he went on. "But it's been in my mind, ever since—since you cleaned me out, to make enough to take up that note. When I was rich I kept puttin' it off. It seemed an easy thing to put off the Lord. But when I was down, it ha'nted me. I couldn't read the Good Book for it. On every page I saw: 'You've cheated the Lord; you've cheated the Lord!' So I sot out to get it back—peddlin' in a few sheers. But luck has been ag'in me. I kinder feel now as if I'd never settle it."

To this rambling discourse, Mr. Strong returned no response.

It may be he was recalling a day in the distant past when he had first visited the Street; that early impression of the Exchange and the men who had controlled the reins of affairs; when head and shoulders above them all was the little man whose thumb resembled the wizard's wand. "Samuel says: 'Thumbs up'!" and the market had swayed at his words. But men come and go. Now the erstwhile shrewd old gentleman sat bowed down; his eyes, lack-luster; age pressing heavily upon his bent shoulders.

The man at the window leaned over his desk; hastily wrote a few lines.

"Take this to Mr. Taplin."

The words dissipated the visitor's abstraction. Re-

called to a sense of his surroundings, mechanically he grasped the paper. The old instinct to haggle feebly reasserted itself. He remembered he had been this man's relentless, although unsuccessful, adversary.

"You ain't charging me any more than the others?" he asked cautiously. "It's for you to dictate, but—"

Adjusting his iron-rimmed spectacles, he held the paper close to his face and gave a start of surprise.

"I cal'late you've made a mistake," he said. "This says to settle at—"

"There's no mistake."

The paper trembled in Uncle Samuel's hand.

"No mistake!—I could pay the church!—You don't mean it!—you can't mean it!—"

Richard Strong arose. The other's changed expression was lost upon him; he regarded Uncle Samuel absently, a trace of impatience in his manner. Uncle Samuel also got up; turned slowly away; at the threshold, however, he stopped and looked back. His eyes were moist; his face, engrossed o'er and o'er with lines of venality and avarice, appeared suddenly illumined.

"Richard Strong, you're the only man I always hated. You crushed me once and now—you've crushed me again—but not the same way!"

The old man's voice choked; hastily he felt for the door; opened it; Mr. Strong was alone.

Leaning back in his chair, he looked out. A proces-

sion of melancholy figures streamed through the rain on the other side of the street. For the moment he regarded them, forgetful of Uncle Samuel, the gold crowd, or the excitement of yesterday. Another matter was pressing on his mind, and, turning to his desk, he picked up a missive lying there; read it again:

"Will you please come to the house? I want to explain. Elinor."

To explain! Long he looked at it. What was there to explain? What could be explained?

"Excuse me, sir; the office is full of people."

The man at the desk drew himself up with a start. It seemed as if the other had broken in upon the privacy of his inmost thoughts.

"Well, you know the basis of settlement," he returned.

"Yes, sir—but the Reverend Doctor Clement, sir, he seems to feel very bad and—if you would see him—"

"Treat him like the others—and send a check for the amount of his losses to Mr. Beecher's Tabernacle—for the poor."

Still Tim lingered. "Mr. Dalton has come in," he continued. "He was asking for you, sir."

The letter slipped from Richard Strong's fingers.

"You can show Mr. Dalton in—now!"

"Yes, sir."

Tim departed. A moment later the door opened and Charlie walked in.

CHAPTER XII

THE DAY OF SETTLEMENT

“Good morning, Mr. Strong.”

The speaker's appearance was that of a man who had not slept the night before. His eyes were dull; his face unshaven. In twenty-four hours his features had become pinched and his color a grayish hue. But he bore himself with an effort at steadiness, if not with the assurance he had been wont to assume.

Mr. Strong did not answer; nor did he look at the other.

Come to the house—I want to explain—Elinor's words reiterated themselves in his thoughts.

Dalton drew nearer. “As you know, Mr. Strong,” he began in a mechanical voice, “I acted with the gold crowd yesterday; bought some gold for them; also some for myself—more than I should. The gold purchased for them—under instructions—I have nothing to do with. That—bought for myself, makes it unfortunately incumbent upon me to come to you in person—to settle!”

Still the elder man sat with his back half-turned. He noticed that the letter was dated September twenty-third. It had been written, then, two days before and had lain neglected on his desk that Black Friday.

Dalton's hands opened and closed nervously. He was conscious of feeling sleepy; tired; of something pressing upon his brain.

The other turned in his chair. "What were you saying?"

Charlie flushed. "I was explaining," he remarked, with an effort at self-control.

Mr. Strong glanced at the missive. *I want to explain—* It, too, said that.

He began deliberately to tear up the note.

"Explaining—what?"

"That I find myself the possessor of some gold—bought from you, or the pool you represent, at a high figure."

"How much—did you buy? What price—did you pay?"

Charlie mentioned the amount and the cost.

The other offered no comment. Dalton felt a greater lassitude; most of the night before he had passed on the street or in the lobby of the up-town Exchange—the Fifth Avenue Hotel. He seemed reaching the finale of a disagreeable dream.

"The terms of settlement are—" And Mr. Strong named them.

"Impossible!"

The man at the desk offered no response to the exclamation. Dalton, too, now became silent. He watched the rain—drip—drip—on the window-sill and go splashing on to the street. A little gust and it came in a wild patter against the pane. In the room the shadows deepened. An over-vivid consciousness weighed upon him, but he strove to recall his alertness; to fasten his mind yet more keenly upon the matter in hand.

"Of course the pool have it all their own way," he continued with an effort. "But don't you think the penalty—rather large?"

The other again disregarded the suggestion and Dalton felt that his observations were being swept aside like chaff. This he resented and experienced at once irritation and dejection.

"The attempt to corner gold turned out to your advantage," he said at length. "You've made a great deal of money out of it."

A light flashed up and went out in Richard Strong's eyes.

"You mean I am beholden to the gold clique—to you, perhaps?"

Dalton checked himself, looked down.

"Not that," he returned, and traced a figure with his cane on the carpet. "I don't think I implied that." He felt as if he was forcing himself to speak; to continue an intolerable part. A moment he struggled with himself. "Of course I want to do the best I can." He raised his glance. "You will make it—"

The other repeated the terms he had first specified.

Charlie bit his lip. "Yes, but—"

Mr. Strong seemed more engrossed in the papers on the desk than in the matter in hand.

Across Dalton's mind floated the fatal figures. All he possessed would not cover the loss. He would be bankrupt! Not only that, but in Richard Strong's debt—*his* debt!

Charlie made a quick gesture.

"You have no right—" he began.

The other arose. His gray eyes rested on the white face of the young man; looked him through and through.

"*You* talk about right!"

Something seemed to rise between them—out of a cloud—for the moment Richard Strong felt the moonlight bathing him; the rush of the wind. He strove to put it aside; to blind his eyes to the picture.

"You lent yourself to a conspiracy prepared to stop at nothing—to interest government officials—to get a corner by dishonest means—to steal it—"

"Steal!" Dalton's face changed. He was no longer pale. "The Street doesn't look at those matters in that way."

Mr. Strong's laugh was not pleasant to hear. "The Street! It does not, perhaps, too closely differentiate between an honest man and a—"

Charlie's control was fast slipping from him. "No man shall call me—"

"A thief!—a worse than thief!" The words rang out sharply.

Dalton's fist clenched; with an oath he sprang upon the other. But the upraised hand was arrested, held in a grip like steel.

"You fool! You fool!" said a voice. "Do not tempt me to kill you. Once I intended to—waited for you on the road—"

Charlie threw himself back. "The road! What—"

Suddenly he began to understand—that night of the Eclipse party—Elinor's subsequent illness—her refusal to see him—

"He was watching—was behind us—and saw—"

For a few moments neither spoke. The younger man stood as if stunned. A rap on the door was drowned by the rattle and rumble of a passing omnibus, and a loud chorus of voices on the street: "Fisk repudiates his obligations!" "All about the suicide of—"

The rap was repeated but not heard; the door of the office opened. A lady entered, who upon sight of the two men stopped short, regarding them with momentary hesitation and indecision. She started to speak when—

“But I tell you if you think your wife—” began Charlie.

Power of endurance suddenly deserted his listener. An emotion primeval, terrible, transformed his face. Involuntarily the girl drew back, half-concealed by the screen of a great book-case.

“Hush!” he breathed hoarsely. “Don’t mention her name!”

The young man made an aggressive movement.

“You needn’t believe me,” he said, “but you can believe in her.”

“In *her*?”

Whatever else Charlie was, or had been, he was not a coward. Even the menace, hatred, written on the other’s face did not deter him.

“Yes, in her!” he reiterated. “I swear to you before that night—”

Richard Strong laughed—a laugh that cut the listening girl like a knife.

“Before that night! Of course! Nothing ever does happen before—”

"You do not want to know the truth—"

"The truth! From your lips—or hers—"

Something seemed to deaden his senses. He saw himself as a grotesque figure in a terrible comedy—a play of Molière's which he had seen some years ago—and left before it had been finished!

"You have acted a lie—in the office and out of it. She lied at the altar. She has lied ever since. You are both liars—both!"

He spoke against his will. He felt himself a child unto himself. "Fool! Triple fool!" Like the man in the play he opened the window of his breast to his enemy. He—self-contained—the man of reserve! It seemed the most unnatural part of that unreal farce.

"Liars! and worse!"

A woman's slender figure came between them.

"Elinor!"

It was the younger man who spoke. But it was to Richard Strong she turned.

"Why are you here?"

Meeting his look, her purpose faded from her mind; only his words—the words she had overheard—filled her brain to the exclusion of all else.

"Liars!" She had come to tell him the truth, yesterday and again to-day; to confess her share of the blame,

but now in the face of his dark accusing glance, pretext or excuse seemed weak and unavailing.

"Why are you here?"

Her figure straightened involuntarily. A touch of the old antagonism coursed through her veins; chilled her. Repentance, humility, froze within her. White as marble, she stood with burning eyes.

"I suppose," she said, "I came to tell you—lies!"

In his glance shone a savage, ironical amusement. "I can believe that."

Her gaze grew brighter. "Believe what you please," she cried.

Quickly Dalton stepped forward. "Damn it, Elinor, why don't you tell him—"

"Let her alone!" The voice was Richard Strong's, sharp, commanding. "She's in the mood to tell the truth."

The young man faced him passionately.

"Since she won't speak, I will—"

"I believe," interrupted Richard Strong, "our business is at an end."

"But I tell you the fault was mine; she never meant—"

Mr. Strong turned swiftly.

"Are you willing to take shelter beneath this magnanimous pretext?"

The dark eyes flashed into his; she drew herself up proudly. "Take shelter!" she said. "No! No! All I wish is to be free—to leave *you*—for ever!"

She spoke quickly, almost wildly. He wanted the truth and yet he would not believe her. Why resist? Right or wrong, his way was the only way. He was always triumphant—always master of himself and others. Yesterday she had thought and hoped— But now her sole desire was to escape from this dominion; to put herself beyond the reach of his bounty.

With an exclamation which was not lost upon Richard Strong, Charlie took his hat. At the threshold he stopped and looked back. He was ruined,—but his glance was not that of one vanquished.

Through a rift in the clouds without, the sunlight had broken and the yellow shaft shot into the narrow street. From the eaves the rain fell sparkling. Elinor waited until Dalton had had time to leave the building and then began to fasten one of her gloves.

"If you are ready to go, I will call a carriage."

Her hand trembled a little with the button.

"No; I prefer to walk."

He offered no demur. The sunlight touched her; she moved out into the shadow. He thought she was going, when—

"My father—has had a sudden attack," she said; "has

been very ill. The doctors have ordered him away—I am going with him.”

He did not answer.

“We are going to France.” Her voice faltered a little. “You will never be troubled with me again.”

He held open the door. He was very pale.

“Good-by,” she said, and quickly passed out.

He started forward, her name on his lips, but clenching his hands, arrested the motion; closed the door. Still, however, he stood there. A footstep—was it she, returning?

Some one knocked and he stepped back as the chief clerk entered.

“They say they’re going to arrest Corbin, sir; the relative of President Grant.”

Mr. Strong stood with head down-bent, half-turned from the other.

“Corbin? Corbin?” he said at last.

Tim regarded his master in surprise.

“You were speaking about him only the other day, sir. It was through him the clique sought to reach the president.”

The other’s reply was an indirect one. Had he heard Tim’s words?

“I believe I’ll take a vacation for the day,” he said absently. “I’m not feeling as well as I might.”

The chief clerk stared at his employer; his manner was strange, unusual.

"Very good, sir!" said Mr. Taplin, sympathetically, recovering himself. "Very good! A little fresh air's what you want, sir. I hope you meet the commodore," he added.

"The commodore?"

"You're going to take out the team, aren't you, sir? Well, the commodore has said that no man except his brother Jake *dares* pass him on the road."

CHAPTER XIII

DALTON IS PUZZLED

As Elinor left the office she almost fancied she heard her name called. So strong was the impression, an instant she hesitated, then, smiling scornfully at herself, dismissed the thought. He, care for her now? He, yield to a moment's weakness?

Curious glances followed her as she walked through the outer offices.

"Wonder if she's been settling?" murmured one of the clerks.

"*She?* That's his wife," answered a fellow knight of the pen.

Turning into the narrow street Elinor moved on without thought of where she was going. She was vaguely conscious of a mournful throng of people approaching and passing and felt that in a greater or less degree they were of kin; that she was one of them. Here failure was written on a pinched, white face; there ruin looked out of the haunting depths of dark eyes. How dreary the world was! How hopeless the future! The

spirit that erstwhile had sustained her was succeeded by a weight and depression she could not throw off.

Standing at the corner of the street and Broadway a young man waited. Now he strode to and fro; then paused and with mingled anxiety and restlessness surveyed the figures drawing near. Why did she not come? And when she did come what should he say to her? Reflectively he gazed across the road toward the church. The front door of the sacred edifice was open; a few people were entering; a few going out.

He began to consider his position and hers and found himself enmeshed in a confusion of conflicting influences. He was alternately depressed and elated; dejected and hopeful.

"I'll go," he thought, "and think it over."

Then her words in the office recurred to him: "All I wish is to be free!"

"I knew it! I knew it!" he repeated, and lingered. Again he gazed eagerly down the street. A new and greater impatience moved him; then his manner changed; a warm hue mantled his cheek and he advanced quickly.

"Elinor!"

With a start she regarded him; but if Dalton had expected any sign of satisfaction from her at the sight of him, any trace of a deeper feeling, he was doomed to

disappointment. Her face was cold, pale; all the fire had gone out of it. With no word of answer to his exclamation she walked on; involuntarily he followed. For a few moments there was silence; the exultant look in his eye while he had watched for her, faded.

"I was waiting for you," he began slowly. "For several days I have been trying to see you."

She did not reply at once. "Yes," she said finally in a low voice, "they told me you called."

His eyes searched her quickly. Her tone was monotonous, dull. That was but natural, however, under the circumstances, after the events of the morning. Dalton hesitated, strove to think of something to say, and the silence became oppressive.

"I know how you must blame me," he at last went on.

She looked straight ahead. "I blame myself."

For some time Dalton pondered over her words. Perhaps he had wanted her to blame him; perhaps he had expected that she would do so. Her answer now seemed somehow to exclude him from the pale of her thoughts.

"You?" he said. "Why—" and stopped.

She offered no further explanation. Although conscious of his presence, she was more vividly cognizant of the expression of Richard Strong's face when last she had looked at him. Despite herself, that final impression lingered with her; she could not dismiss it. She

felt it now, and was fain to pass her hand before her eyes.

"I wanted to tell you—how sorry I was."

She regarded Dalton calmly. Empty, distant, meaningless sounded his voice.

Charlie bit his lip. "I know it sounds very trite," he returned.

She did not controvert the statement and a number of excuses he had in his mind died on his lips. This seemed neither the time nor the place for them. For the moment his self-poise suffered; he knew himself mastered by circumstances, rather than master of them. The consciousness of his fall from fortune hung over him like a pall. And that other chain binding him—the secret elation he had hugged to his breast was not without its tinge of bitterness.

"Where are you going?" he asked, looking at the pavement.

"Going?" she repeated. "I don't know."

It seemed as if she were speaking of the future, not the immediate present. Charlie slackened his pace, but she continued to move on without noticing and once more he regulated his step to hers.

The street was now almost vividly bright in the sunshine. The paving blocks shone from the recent rain; the sidewalks gleamed; the carriages reflected the light,

and all the world glowed with external cheer. Above, the sky was of a deep, clarified blue; against the horizon the dark clouds lay like a parted veil that was fast vanishing.

Gradually Dalton's eye took on an answering spark. Was there no ray of sunshine anywhere for them? That day had been a trying one. But the morrow? An optimistic feeling that "things would straighten themselves somehow" moved him. He was young yet; the road lay long before them; her presence was the incentive for secret sanguine imaginings.

He began to talk of other matters. Money—that was easily won. Had he not once acquired it quickly? He could do so again; life was a game for wealth, power; he would win for himself a place. But there was more, besides—one thing especially.

Again he strove to catch her glance, led away by his own feverishness.

"Don't you think so?" he asked.

She did not reply; he repeated his question.

"What?" she said.

He stared at her. She had not heard. His words had fallen on ears that were deaf. With knitted brows he walked on.

In the press of belated people, they came together and were separated. At the curb of an intersecting street

he touched her arm, drawing her back from a carriage. As he did so, a man looked down on them from the vehicle, and, with a quick exclamation, she started back. But an instant, the carriage passed on; Richard Strong did not look around. She stood there with flushed face, her hands closed. Appearances were all against her; he who had been sure before, now must feel assurance doubly sure.

Dalton's attitude was the antithesis to her own. A few muttered words from him, as he gazed after the vanishing form, sharply recalled her from her stupor. Sudden anger assailed her.

"Hush!" she said. "You shall not say that."

He regarded her not without wonder—the kindling gaze; the firmly pressed lips.

"You defend him, Elinor? Have you forgotten—"

"I'll not hear a word against him!" she cried.

"Why, he called you—he thought you—"

"What has that to do with it?" she answered passionately.

For the second time that day she had greatly surprised him. First, in the office; now, here. A moment he stared at her.

"Do you know what I think?" he said. "I believe—"

"Believe what you please!" she exclaimed wildly.

"Only leave me."

"You mean that?"

His features grew more haggard; his eyes, bright with fatigue, looked searchingly into her own.

She stopped. The clatter of the pavement like an echo of thunder seemed to beat on his senses; the air was filled with a discord of noises intrusively clamorous.

"Elinor, I can't leave you."

With an impatient movement she turned away; it seemed but to fan the fever in his blood. He thrust forth his arm; some one brushed against it.

"My dear Mrs. Strong!"

Another voice, at once subdued and serious, broke in upon them, and the Reverend Doctor Clement, hat in hand, approached.

"How do you do?" Apparently he did not note anything unusual in their appearance.

"I'm so glad to see you—so glad!" he continued, but his accents were a shade less sanguine than usual. "I have just come from the Street."

Charlie laughed savagely and the reverend gentleman colored. It was all very well to shear the sheep, but the shepherd—that was another matter.

"It's a sad day!" he said ruefully, shaking his head. The Reverend Doctor Clement, however, was never long in a melancholy mood; his buoyant nature now en-

deavored to reassert itself. Mrs. Strong was a handsome, agreeable woman, and—

“May I walk on with you?” he added. “You were going up-town, were you not, Mrs. Strong?”

She bowed assent.

“You are coming, too, Mr. Dalton?” asked the rector.

Elinor made an unconscious gesture. “Mr. Dalton was just leaving me,” she said hastily.

The young man’s face changed. Annoyance, disappointment, some deeper emotions, were at war within him. But he drew himself up with a start.

“Yes; just leaving!” he returned mechanically, and raised his hat. “I have to be off.”

CHAPTER XIV

THE SHADOW REPUDIATES HIS ALLEGIANCE

On an evening about a week later, Dalton and Tom Marks found themselves seated at a table in the Pacific Gardens. At that hour, a great throng of varied aspect crowded the place to the doors: young women in abbreviated skirts, armed with foaming glasses; poets, artists and writers, ultra-Bohemian of both sexes; broad-faced Teutons, scattered here and there, drinking in the melodies of Strauss and the brew of Gambrinus with equal satisfaction. But Charlie was oblivious of the entertaining character of his surroundings. The ping! ping! of the rifles in the shooting-gallery; the clinking of the balls in the billiard-room, and the occasional rumbling of the bowling-alley alike failed to arouse him.

At an adjoining table sat a person as observant of the passing spectacle as Dalton was indifferent to it. His little eyes sparkled; he bestowed a good-natured glance upon his companion, a fair lady from the Platonian republic of artists that made Bleeker Street their haunt and their home.

"See that young fellow over there?" he said, jerking his chubby thumb with ill-concealed satisfaction toward Charlie. "He's one of those that's played out. Made his first money in my office and then—" Here the Jolly Boy related in substance from his point of view the history of his connection with Dalton. "Threw me over!" he concluded in a lively tone. "But I told him every dog would have his day!"

"I suppose the Rossiters got away all right?"

Tom, after a discouraged lapse into muteness, again essayed to awaken in Charlie a sense of the clarifying properties of conversation and good fellowship.

Dalton did not look up. "I suppose so," he answered.

"They should be well out on the briny by this time," continued Mr. Marks. "Were you at the wharf? No? Strange! Mr. Strong wasn't down either. I saw him on the Street at the time the boat was advertised to leave. Business, I suppose!"

Charlie stroked his glass with nervous, white fingers.

"How long does Mrs. Strong expect to be absent?"

"I don't know."

Dalton's gaze wandered to the Jolly Boy. That gentleman nodded over-cheerfully; his countenance displayed unmistakably that he *was* glad to see the young man under the circumstances, but Charlie neither perceived nor was aware of the beaming complacency.

"It will be dull without her!" said Tom, musingly, As he spoke, he was wondering if he should see as much of the fascinating, though disconcerting, Miss Posie Stanton as formerly. "What do the doctors say about Mr. Rossiter?"

"I didn't hear."

"Very unselfish of Elinor—Mrs. Strong—to go along, to take care of him, isn't it?"

"Talk about something else, Tom!"

The words seemed to burst from Dalton in spite of himself.

Upon the platform a young woman began to sing, her body inclined forward by high heels as she moved across the stage, parodying the Grecian wiggle, the Grecian hop, or the other fantastic movements inseparably associated with the fashionable Bend. For a moment Mr. Marks listened, but neither the song, nor the hop and wiggle long absorbed his attention. His concern was for his friend whose uncertain temper, perhaps, was not altogether to be wondered at under the circumstances. Charlie was "down" and the other was "sticking by him"; a task both thankless and difficult. For several days Dalton's manner had puzzled the other; sometimes he had even wondered if there was anything except financial matters to worry him.

"Don't think of it, Charlie," he now said earnestly.

"You'll pull up. I don't exactly know how much money you owe, or quite what has happened, but I'm sure they can't keep you down. Look at your friends and connections—there's Mr. Strong, for example—"

Dalton laughed oddly.

"The Rossiters are relatives—and Elinor—"

"Elinor!"

Charlie's face had changed like a flash; its expression arrested Mr. Marks' attention; held it. A moment they stared at each other.

"Charlie!" said Tom. A light seemed suddenly to burst upon him. "You—and Elinor—"

Dalton flicked the ash from his cigar.

"Hold on!" he said savagely. For some time silence continued between the two young men; Dalton's glance was aggressive, as if the Shadow, not he, were at fault, and Tom stirred uneasily. Conflicting thoughts moved him. He saw Charlie as he had seen him in the days of their early friendship; the brilliant, handsome, though somewhat careless, Charlie of old college days. He saw him now—and the present seemed unreal and wrong. The idea crossed his mind that Charlie had been in Richard Strong's office; that he owed much to Mr. Strong, yet—

Mr. Marks strove to check this train of reasoning; he

looked down half-guiltily as if ashamed of his own thoughts.

"Suppose we go," he said finally.

"You can."

Tom arose. "I guess I will," he said with simulated ease. "I do feel a bit sleepy."

Something in Tom's eyes held Dalton; he scrutinized him with curling lip. Mr. Marks shifted his weight to his other foot.

"Good night," he said, feeling his face grow a little redder.

"Good night," answered Charlie, shortly.

Slowly Mr. Marks turned away and as he vanished Charlie again reached for the matches, selected one, struck it. It burned his fingers and he dropped it. Like a basilisk the Jolly Boy watched him.

If Charlie was thinking of Tom it was only in an incidental way; that gentleman was not a consequential figure; the change that had come over him seemed important chiefly in indicating his own altered fortunes. Perhaps for a moment Mr. Marks had had the power to awaken his resentment by an implied, if not spoken criticism, but only for a moment. Another vista—wider, illimitable—passed before him.

Involuntarily he thrust his hand into his pocket;

drew forth an envelope, and, after a moment's hesitation, opened it and began to read.

"Never—never write me again as you did to-day—"

What had he written? He hardly remembered; he recalled now only a passionate haste, and smiled scornfully at the inefficacy of his own words.

"You must understand I can never see you again. You will know what I meant when I said I blamed myself. I have been foolish, wicked, and so I write—but nothing can change that—I can not see you. Elinor."

Dalton folded his arms; his heart beat fast against the closed hand that held her letter. Vividly the details and events of that night, but a few weeks old, came back to him; the sudden madness that had swept over him until he knew not what he said; only that he held her in his arms—a sweet, wild moment, broken by her tears, an uncontrollable fit of weeping. Then afterward, the feverish, unending days!

How long did he sit there? Already had the sober, music-loving Teutonic element departed. An influx from the theaters replaced the staid, domestic element. The descendants of the children of Israel that had been feasting their eyes at the ballet or surfeiting their ears at the opera, thronged thirstily into the great bar-room and the smaller apartments, discoursing of the nimbleness of the star at Niblo's or the vocal agility of the

Signorita Capella. Overdressed ladies glided amid the masculine devotees of art and diversion. Financial trouble and the panic seemed forgotten. Disaster, poverty—what place had they in the palace of amusement? The air was filled with smoke, perfume and laughter. The flaring lights revealed no spectacle of misery and want.

Suddenly Dalton shifted his position, a bitter distaste stirring his breast. To end all! The thought came to him; he dismissed it with repugnance and yet—slowly he put out his hand for his hat.

“May I sit down?”

A soft voice at his elbow caused him to look up; two black eyes met his; eyes that went fittingly with the dashing hat, the voluminous dress, the red roses. He did not rise; indeed, hardly seemed to see her; with admirable patience she waited.

“You!” he said finally.

The lady smiled; a smile that seemed to give the lie to skepticism. “You are not very polite. But there is the provocation. The Black Friday! I have read about it!”

Her presence became more insistent, annoying.

“There is one consolation,” he said curtly.

She leaned a little toward him. With a start he

breathed a perfume he remembered—delicate yet penetrating.

“And what—is that?”

A softer light in the lady’s eyes bore with the angry gleam in his.

“It has rid me of you.”

“On the contrary, *mon ami!*” The black eyes sparkled. “You are ruined, *n’est ce pas?*”

He volunteered no denial.

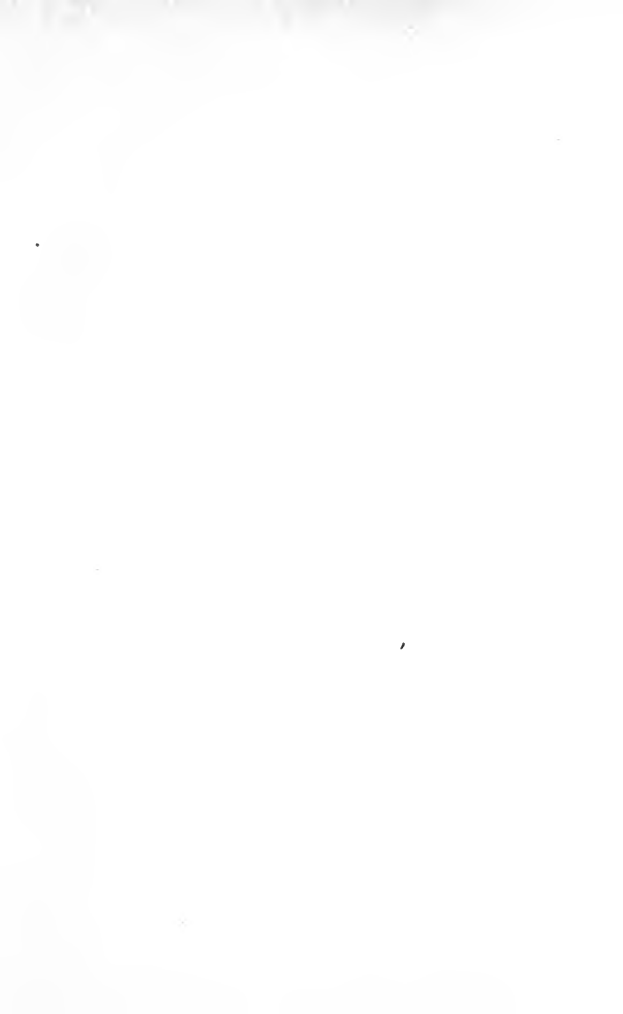
“That is it,” she went on, and nodded her head in gratified appreciation of a dramatic effect. “I am the wife. My place, it is here.”

He stared at her as not understanding. She raised the roses to her face.

“May I—sit down?”

Her voice was insinuating, caressing. He did not answer; an old gulf seemed opening; he did not care.

BOOK III



BOOK III

CHAPTER I

AN INTERRUPTED SONG

"Are you sure we have been wise in coming to Paris, papa?"

"Why not, my dear? Peace has been ratified. The German troops have left the city. Do you see any indications of grim-visaged war or the terrible siege? No; no! Paris is quite herself again."

And leaning complacently back in the carriage, the speaker gazed, not without pleasure, upon the fête-like scene up and down the animated boulevards.

"You see," he went on, "everybody is out and—everybody is happy. That is why I wanted to come to Paris—to feel young again!"

Her glance lighted with ready sympathy, and, following his, lingered curiously upon the stream of people in bright-colored dresses and fresh spring bonnets.

On the sidewalk many in the promenading throng found likewise a source for speculation in the occupants

of the public conveyance, and turned to gaze after them.

The gentleman had snow-white hair, a pale, refined face, an aristocratic bearing. The girl was young, beautiful and, obviously, his daughter. But whereas his face was weak, sensitive, almost childish in its irresponsibility, hers was serious, earnest, yet proudly self-reliant. That they had just entered the city was apparent from the trunks before them.

Turning into a quiet thoroughfare, the carriage drove up before a four-story dwelling, one of the older structures of the street, antedating the mansion-building period of the late emperor. The old gentleman regarded the house almost eagerly, when from the unpretentious entrance emerged a thick-set, phlegmatic-looking woman.

"You are looking for rooms, Monsieur?" she said, standing with arms akimbo and turning her eyes from one to the other.

"Yes; does Madame Fracard live here?"

An expression of surprise crossed the woman's face. "She has been dead these ten years!"

"Dear! Dear!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "And Monsieur Fracard?"

"Alas!"—stolidly—"he followed madame."

The gentleman's face fell. "Both gone!" he said. "I *am* disappointed; I might have expected it, yet"—re-

garding the girl—"it makes me feel like Rip Van Winkle."

"I was afraid you would be disappointed," she said gently.

"Monsieur knew Madame Fracard?" asked the woman.

"For a good many years I lived in Paris—here. In this house! That was long ago! Long ago!"

Some of the animation faded from his face; he sank into momentary reverie.

"If you wish to see rooms—"

He brightened at once. "Good! By all means! only"—with a whimsical look—"they must not be so high up as they used to be."

Half an hour thereafter Mr. Rossiter and his daughter were seated in a little private sitting-room into which streamed the warm sunshine, revealing the well-worn carpet and heavy, though faded, hangings. Mr. Rossiter peered about with unabated interest, examining the bric-à-brac and then gazing down the street, while Elinor quietly began to open some letters that they had brought with them from the bank, where they had stopped on their way.

"Here is a letter from Posie Stanton I haven't read yet."

Mr. Rossiter, with an air of comfort, drew a cigar

from his pocket. "Read your mother's letter again, my dear; I only half-heard it."

"She thinks she will stay a little longer at the baths—the Reverend Doctor Clement is there—it is not at all dull—she doesn't think she will come to Paris, but will join us later in London—when the season is fairly begun there. But look at it yourself,"—handing him the missive—"and I will glance over the others."

Deliberately he began to peruse the epistle, a message long in paper, if short in matter, for a page of stationery could contain but a few words of the large impressive handwriting of the good lady. He had reached the last page of the letter, when an exclamation caused him to glance up.

"What is it, my dear?"

"Nothing."

"Not bad news from home?"

"Not at all," she answered with constraint.

"You didn't hear from—any one else?" he said, gazing at her half-wistfully and then at the letters. She professed not to understand.

"Yes," she answered gaily, at the same time rising quickly; "I have really quite a voluminous correspondence. But how would you like to go out? You can show me the sights, you know. That is, if it won't tire you."

"Tire me?" He got up with alacrity. "Not a bit! The winter at the baths has made quite a new man of me."

She gazed at him searchingly—his white face had a spot of color on each cheek; his eyes an almost unnatural gleam—then gravely took up his hat and handed him his gloves and cane.

"You are very good to me, my dear," he observed. "I don't know what I should do without you."

The shining brown hair just brushed the white hair. "We always have understood each other very well, haven't we?"

"What!" he laughed. "Understand a woman? Even though she is your own daughter!"

Her hand fell from his shoulder and, turning, she drew on her gloves.

"I am all ready if you are, papa."

Their footsteps resounded loudly as they descended. The house had a solitary, gloomy aspect. Save for a porter and the woman, they had seen no one. The latter now stood at the door.

"You will return for supper, Monsieur?"

"Yes, Madame. You can prepare something light, with one of those fine salads Madame Fracard used to make—an entrée, perhaps, and—something from the *pâtisserie*. You can serve the meal in our sitting-room at half-past six."

"Have you many guests now?" asked Elinor, as they were leaving.

"There are no others, Madame," answered the woman, soberly. "Strangers have not yet begun to return to Paris."

"Well, well," said Mr. Rossiter, soothingly, "the city will soon fill up."

But on the sidewalk he sighed.

"How unlike Madame Fracard!" Then he paused with amused expression before a flaming proclamation posted on one of the walls: "*Death and bombs!—Daggers for the traitors of the Government!*"

"What does it mean, papa?"

"Words! Just words!" he said lightly. "A call of the patriots to arms; to overthrow the government. These gentlemen, having finished a war with the enemy, now think they would like an opportunity to kill one another. But come, my dear, what do you say to a drive in the park?"

She offered no demur and soon they were driving toward the Arc de Triomphe. When they returned, the day was drawing to a close. Through the mist, all golden lay the city; in the distance trees and shrubbery were suspended in magical light. A brooding peace lay over sward and pavement. With knitted brows the girl looked out; violence, bloodshed,—what had they in

common with the fairy-like city? Soothingly the breeze, redolent with flowers, fanned her cheek. How beautiful was nature, and yet life—how complex!

Slowly sank the sun; upon the retina of her eyes yet remained an outline of the last segment of the glowing circle; then that too, vanished, and the incoming shadows fell mysteriously.

“Here we are! And I’ve brought back a capital appetite with me.”

She looked up with a start. “Are we home so soon?”

The candles threw a bright glow upon the snowy cover of the table that was spread in their sitting-room when they reëntered that apartment.

“There! This is what I call nice and cozy!” said Mr. Rossiter. “A dainty repast, a bottle of light claret, and—last, but not least!—you, my dear, to grace the board. How do you like Paris, Elinor?” he added.

“It is very beautiful, but”—she paused.

“What?”

“Nothing. I suppose I was thinking of that proclamation. I won’t any more. Don’t you think we might as well use all the candles?” she added, with a change of tone.

He smiled indulgently. “What extravagance! But go ahead.”

"There!" she said a few moments later. "It makes quite an illumination, doesn't it?"

And the meal passed merrily enough. Mr. Rossiter was profuse in his praise of the dishes; the salad was mixed just right; the wine suited his taste. He became vivacious, anecdotal, and tales of the empire, stories of the court, pictures of the people he had seen and known in those early days followed in quick succession. Elinor noted, however, that despite his assertion when they had returned and his compliments on the cooking, he ate even more sparingly than usual. The flush on his face had deepened, although he had taken but little of the wine, and, leaning her head on her elbow, the girl watched him, occasionally nodding assent. Silently the woman moved in or out of the room; then placing the dishes on a tray, she vanished with a curt good night.

Mr. Rossiter waved his cigar back and forth as he talked, the past seeming to crowd upon him—the gay, heedless past! His manner perplexed her; in the silent house, perhaps by contrast, it affected her, as she thought of the long, dark corridors, the guests who had gone, the empty rooms.

He had been talking about the opera—the old opera—and now he arose and approached the piano to exemplify his theme. "Ah, they had real melodies in those

days—the good old days,” said he, as he half-turned toward her. “Then a prima-donna was likened to a nightingale! A concert was a charming occasion, not a bombardment.”

She pressed her hands together tightly.

“Don’t you think it is getting late, papa?”

He shook his head, his fingers continuing to run over the keys, when—boom! boom!—two loud detonations afar were followed by a distant volley of deep rumbling sounds. The melody died on the singer’s lips.

“Why, what was that?” he said.

Elinor went to the window, drew back the curtain and looked out.

“Do you see anything?” he asked querulously.

“Nothing!”

He went to the bell-rope and pulled it. No one answered. Again he strove to summon the woman or the porter.

“You stay here, papa,” said the girl, after an interval. “I’ll go down and find her.”

Mr. Rossiter looked at the piano; he was vexed; put out. His song had been interrupted; and no singer, great or small, likes to be stopped in the middle of a cadenza.

In the dark entrance of the house Elinor discovered the woman and the porter, looking down the street.

"What has happened?" she asked quietly.

But even as she spoke a number of boys ran shouting down the thoroughfare: "*Vive la Commune! Vive la Commune!*"

The woman's glance turned. "The Commune have pledged themselves to overthrow the government and—" folding her arms—"they have begun."

A moment Elinor looked down thoughtfully, then retraced her steps to the sitting-room, where Mr. Rositer was pacing up and down.

"Well, my dear, well?" he asked with a certain impatience.

She did not wish needlessly to alarm him, so made light of what she had learned, but added: "Perhaps, though, it may become unpleasant here and we had better leave to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" His face expressed emphatic dissent. "Leave Paris! We have just come! Besides, there won't be any serious trouble—"

She did not answer at once. To persuade her father to go without unduly exciting him might require diplomacy.

"But if I'm afraid, papa?"

"Tut! tut! You don't know the Parisians, my dear. They are like children—fond of proclamations and—"

"Won't you go—for my sake?" she pleaded.

Lightly he stroked her hair.

"Of course if you really wish—"

She put her arms about his neck.

"Very well, my dear!"

"Good!" she exclaimed almost gaily. "And now"—
her arms loosening—"go on with your song."

CHAPTER II.

AN ENFORCED SOJOURN.

But they did not leave the next day. When Elinor rapped at her father's door early in the morning, a feeble voice answered, and, entering, she found him feverish, light-headed. At once she summoned a doctor who examined the old gentleman, looked grave, and wrote a prescription. As for going away, said the medical man, that was impossible for the present—what the patient needed was absolute rest and quiet. When should they be able to take their departure? It would be impossible to say; in a week; perhaps sooner.

Watching by her father's side, the day passed slowly, but toward night Mr. Rossiter sank into slumber; his respiration became more even; his temperature, better.

"He is doing nicely," said the doctor, who called again. "Only I do not conceal from you that his condition is serious."

Late that night the girl sat up; occasionally she bent over her father, but at length lay down on the

sofa. A troubled sleep. Now and then she awoke of her own accord; again she was startled by some noise without; sounds like the quick, measured tramping of soldiers' feet! Once she thought she heard the cracking of musketry afar and started up. She held her breath; had she been mistaken? Dreaming? The ominous stillness of the moment was broken only by the sound of breathing from the bed, and noiselessly she stole to the couch. No, he had not been disturbed. A moment she stood there; then returned to the sofa.

"Elinor!"

Her father's voice aroused her. It seemed but a few minutes later; yet day had dawned, sunless, overcast. At once she hastened to his bedside where she found him sitting up; his eyes, clearer; his manner, impatient.

"Are the trunks packed?"

"What for?" she asked gently.

"I thought we were going to leave Paris."

"And I thought you wanted to stay!"

"I don't want to stay," he announced.

"We seem to have changed places," she said with a smile. "Before, it was you—"

"You are staying on my account, my dear," he interrupted. "I am well enough to go."

"I am afraid the doctor would never consent to

that." She endeavored to answer him lightly. "He made me promise to keep you quiet for a few days."

"A few days," cried Mr. Rossiter. "It may then be too late."

Placing her hands on his shoulders, she quietly forced him back upon the pillows.

"Is that the way you obey orders?" she asked reproachfully.

"Well, well!" he said with a show of resignation. "I suppose you are right." And added irrelevantly: "God bless you, my dear!"

She seated herself on the edge of the bed and stroked his hand softly. He closed his eyes. She thought he was sleeping, but his lips again moved and he muttered something she did not catch.

"What is it, papa?"

He looked at her with sudden inquiry. "Nothing, my dear, nothing! Only an old proverb came to me."

"An old proverb?" she asked in surprise.

"Yes. 'A good daughter makes a good wife!'"

Across the pallor of her cheek swept a quick flush, while the hand that touched his ceased its motion. Heretofore he had never questioned his daughter on the subject of Richard Strong, having left that family task to Mrs. Rossiter. Perhaps Elinor's manner in response to that lady's hints, inquiries and innuendoes,

had deterred him at the outset from supplementing her futile efforts with his own. That the girl had been disposed to keep her own counsel had seemed sufficient reason to the sensitive Mr. Rossiter to refrain from seeking the causes of the one fact that was patent—her separation from Richard Strong. He might invite her confidence, but he would never seek to force it. In the face of his wife's displeasure at her failure in the attempted rôle of peacemaker, Mr. Rossiter's mute, but sympathetic, demeanor had drawn father and daughter but the closer together.

Now, however, lying there helpless, anxiety for her welfare impelled him to speak.

"A good daughter! a good wife!" he repeated. "You are all that any man could ask. All and more! He is respected; esteemed. He loved you—dearly. It was not difficult to see that. Nor could you have been indifferent to him. Yet you never hear from him; you do not write to him."

Hastily she drew back, but his fingers closed detainingly on her hand.

"Suppose anything should happen to me, Elinor. You would be left alone—your future problematical?"

Her face was turned away; she did not reply.

"I presume, my dear," he went on, "all people have their little troubles when they are first married. Even

your mother and I had our little differences which seemed large enough at the time, but after a while we got along very well together; very well, indeed! In your own case, perhaps, you formed certain ideals and you found that these preconceived notions—”

“Papa!”

The accents of her voice held him; the appeal in her eyes. His grasp loosened; he lay back and looked at the ceiling.

Swiftly she knelt at the bed; something arose in her throat. “Please do not think me cold, or unfeeling. I’m not; really I’m not. I feel my position keenly; the falseness, the humiliation of it!”

“My dear!” He was looking at her now.

“When mama has questioned and urged me, I have not been so hard, so unnatural, as I have seemed. I know she is very angry with me; that she blames me greatly. And I know that you have been very patient with me; that you do not mind that I have been a disappointment to you—a burden—”

“Elinor!—”

She laid her cheek against his. “I do not mean to keep things from you, but it can never be mended—never! He would not—I know you want to help me, but you can’t, dear, you can’t! And—really, I’m not unhappy at all. And”—coaxingly—“I’m going to

nurse you and you are going to get well soon, and we'll go to London and have a good time together."

When had he ever been able to resist her? Not in the past, and now, at her words, his purpose weakened. It was easier to accept her explanation than to seek further to overcome her reserve; and Mr. Rossiter, as usual, reconciled himself to the easier course.

"Very well, my dear!" he said. "I won't keep you here long, depend upon it! I'll soon be on my feet again."

And truly, despite the disquieting events that ensued in Paris, his condition took a more favorable turn and before a week had passed the fever had left him. Convalescent, he was, nevertheless, feeble, debilitated. He had proved a docile invalid, amenable to treatment; comparatively calm and complacent in circumstances calculated to disturb the most phlegmatic nature. Was he but acting a part? Elinor often asked herself the question.

The city daily grew more disordered, more chaotic, but her impatience to escape from their environment found at length its relief, when at the end of seven long, almost interminable days, the doctor announced the welcome news that her father might leave Paris and proceed to London by slow and easy stages.

"Your father should be able to stand the journey," he said. "It is not very trying."

"Oh, I'm sure he'll be able to!" she answered eagerly. "He seems so much improved—only weak. We can leave perhaps this afternoon."

"There is one little formality to be observed first," he continued. "It will be necessary to procure a passport. The new police prefect has caused all the gates to be closed."

"In that case," she returned, "I'll go at once to get it."

When Elinor returned to her father's room she wore her bonnet and jacket.

"*Au revoir*, papa!" she said gaily, bowing to him from the doorway.

With a gleam of pleasure he surveyed her from the chair in which he was sitting, clad in his dressing-gown. "*Au revoir!*" he answered, almost brightly. "You don't mean—"

"Yes; we are off at last!"—adjusting her veil at the glass.

"But where are you going?"

"To get the passports!" she replied. "Is there anything you would like me to bring you back?"

"Only—yourself, my dear!"

She kissed her fingers to him from the threshold. "Never fear! Like the bad penny, I always return."

At the little office at the foot of the stairway she paused to inquire the direction to the department of

the prefect of police. Expressing no curiosity, madame briefly told her the way and almost buoyantly the girl departed on her errand. The lonesomeness and worry of the past week seemed like a disagreeable dream. To leave Paris! Her feet fairly danced along. Even the changed and mournful appearance of the streets did not depress her—the closed houses; the barred doors; the cafés mockingly gay by contrast! As she moved on, she observed many vehicles laden with household goods and trunks wending their way to the station, and she breathed deeply in anticipation of the perfumed air she soon would find beyond the grim walls of the menacing city.

CHAPTER III

THE GAMIN AND THE ROSE

"Refused the passport!" Mr. Rossiter's face expressed his indignation.

Elinor slowly drew off her gloves. "The man said it was customary to investigate all applications."

"It is an outrage."

"One more day won't matter," she answered, looking down. "And—and I'll call again to-morrow."

She did not tell him of the reception accorded her at the prefecture; how she had been obliged to stand in a room filled with tobacco smoke in the presence of several officers and a rough-looking man in civilian attire; how the former had stared at her and the latter had insolently questioned her without removing the pipe from his lips, until the blood had flushed her cheeks and her dark eyes had lighted with angry fire. They were bright now, but her face was pale as she bent herself to the task of appearing indifferent, assured.

Mr. Rossiter, however, was not easily calmed and Elinor with difficulty persuaded him to forego his intention of visiting personally the authorities. Propping him up in the chair, she set herself to the task of diverting him from the consideration of the vexations or perils of their surroundings. A new book by Disraeli—*Lothair*—she brought forth from the top of her trunk and opened with a show of interest.

"Every one is reading it, papa, and now is our opportunity," she said and began to read aloud.

"A very ordinary book, my dear!" he remarked when she had finished the second chapter. "To my mind, quite inferior to his other works!"

She laid it down. "Well, then, we'll talk," she said with assumed cheerfulness. "You can tell me about Paris—*your* Paris—"

"*My* Paris," remarked Mr. Rossiter, "did not detain you forcibly within its walls. *My* Paris was smiling, beautiful—not coarse, brutal!"

She did not controvert him, only gazed mechanically without.

That night a desultory bombardment of the city began; a brief demonstration, and stillness again reigned.

But for Elinor sleep seemed out of the question. Toward midnight her father dozed and noiselessly she stole out of his chamber into the sitting-room. A chill air

had descended on the city, and with a shiver, she drew her wrapper closer, then stooping before the hearth touched a match to the pine cones in the grate. Tiny flames sprang up, played upon the coal, and a loud crackling filled the room. She closed the door so that the noise might not awaken her father and then, sinking into a chair, sat with widely opened eyes before the fire. Her mind was unusually active, reviewing the events of their trip and sojourn abroad; her father's illness and the attendant cares; the months of self-repression. As her thoughts swept further back, her foot moved nervously to and fro. She recalled herself as she had been toward Richard Strong—imperious, capricious, inconsistent. She did not feel at all capricious at present. She wondered what he was doing; if he ever thought of her. Of course not, unless—her hands clasped together and long she looked at the fire until into her eyes came a mist which threatened to blind her.

The next day she could not even reach the office of the prefecture, as the thoroughfares in that neighborhood had been turned into camps and the guards refused to allow her to pass. But one course was open for her, and, returning to the house, she addressed a letter to the authorities.

The mills of the new government, however, like those of the gods, ground slowly, and day after day passed

without reply, until in the order of events an unforeseen embarrassment arose. Stimulated by the possibility of a second siege, prices had soared higher and higher and Elinor, after meeting the doctor's bill, the apothecary's account and madame's demands, found she had fairly exhausted the funds they had brought with them. This at first gave her no apprehension, for she had written to Mr. Rossiter's London banker for more money, but one day the edict went forth that no letters or telegrams should be delivered in Paris.

Before her father she put the brightest face on the matter.

"Well, here we are fairly marooned, papa! We might as well be on a desert island."

But to the woman she said later, not without anxiety: "If no letters are delivered, how can I pay you?"

The other's heavy face expressed a trace of emotion.

"Perhaps you would—trust us?"

"It costs money to trust," was the deliberate reply. "I haven't any."

"You mean that you—you would turn us out?"

"There is the Mont-de-Piété!" coldly.

The pawn-shop! Fortunately a branch of that useful establishment, conducted by the government, lay within a district Elinor could reach without being stopped by the guards, and perforce acting upon the

woman's suggestion, the girl at once set out as cheerfully as she might upon her novel errand.

Arriving at her destination, she was again obliged to exercise her patience, for the place was crowded; on every side pale, wan faces speaking of misery and want. Among these people she waited she knew not how long, but finally a sharp-eyed, not unkindly-looking man behind a desk motioned to her and she approached, opening a small bag she carried and displaying sundry little relics and heirlooms.

"You must leave these to be appraised by the committee," said the man. "Then we will advance four-fifths of their value."

"I should prefer the money at once—whatever you please—only I must have it now!" she returned quickly.

He studied the pale, refined face, behind the dark veil.

"Well, I will take the responsibility of a small advance," he answered after a moment.

A brooch that had belonged to some foremother of Maiden Lane, or Maid's Path, in old New York, brought Elinor only the small sum of thirty francs. A locket containing a portrait of a lady attired in a gown of baize—suggesting the inevitable petticoat of linsey-woolsey beneath—fared little better, but an antique bracelet,

set with rubies, was awarded a sum so large by the critical examiner, that Elinor forthwith returned the rest of her wares to the little bag.

"You can redeem these articles," said the man, courteously, "any time within fourteen months. After that, they will be sold."

Thanking him, she thrust the notes gladly into her dress, and, folding up the receipt which he handed her, escaped as quickly as might be from that scene of penury and distress. But the effect of it lingered, one figure—that of a poor old man—especially haunting her. Now she experienced a sudden compunction that she had forgotten him in her new-found affluence, and hesitating, she was half-minded to return, when a carriage, driving by near the curb, attracted her attention and arrested her purpose. In the vehicle, which was drawn by a superb pair of horses, reclined a woman who smiled upon the throng.

"*La belle Zoldene!*" cried a street urchin, running toward the equipage.

The woman in the carriage laughed and threw a flower to the boy.

"Zoldene! Zoldene!" repeated a number of people.

Quickly Elinor looked up—as quickly drew back. Beside the dancer was seated a man, and, as the equipage dashed on, the girl had the startling impression of a

familiar face—a face linked with the past—different—
—yet—

“A rose! A rose! Who’ll buy a rose?”

The urchin was at her elbow; his face grotesque, impish; his grimy hand holding out the rose. Hastily she turned; hurried on. Fragments of Posie’s last letter, received on the day of their arrival in Paris, recurred to her: “What do you think, my dear? Charlie Dalton is married and has been for some time. To whom? To an actress; a variety actress; Zoldene! It came out in one of the papers—together with the details. I see your start of surprise. Yet it is really and truly true.”

But to have met them both thus in Paris! A strange phantasmagoria of figures mingled and dissolved in the girl’s imagination: The woman throwing flowers to people who were hungry; the pinched-faced urchin, with the rose in his tattered coat; Dalton—another face—far away—dominating all! And amid these unwonted impressions but one desire was paramount: to leave Paris at once; to escape from that anomalous environment!

The permission to leave! If only the prefecture of police would hasten and send—

“Madame, the passports have come,” said the woman, as Elinor entered the Fracard house. “They came while you were away.”

Almost joyfully the girl took them: “Then we will go

at once—to-day. Get the tickets for us and call a carriage.”

The woman regarded the money Elinor thrust into her hand.

“Your father is not so well,” she remarked bluntly. “You were gone so long he insisted upon dressing to go out to look for you. At the door he fell down and we had to carry him back to his room.”

With a cry the girl turned and ran swiftly up the stairs.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNSUCCESSFUL SEARCH

One early morning about a fortnight later a man tried for the second time that day to get into the city of Paris. After having been stopped on the train and turned back because his ignorance of the language of the country had made it impossible for him to understand the questions of the passenger inspector, he had proceeded on foot along the road, or across the meadow land skirting the wall of the capital. At times he advanced to the edge of the moat and paused, looking across to where, beyond the long grass and bright flowers crowning rampart and bastion, arose the neighboring housetops, mockingly near.

But such open reconnaissance was not without its danger; a puff of smoke issued from the parapet, and quietly the man moved back; at a more respectful distance continued on his way, but ever with his eyes bent on the cold, gray outlines of the stone barrier. Now he was trampling a neglected garden patch, when

suddenly he stopped; an opening through the solid masonry rewarded his gaze.

Save for a single sentinel, the immediate vicinity was deserted, but as the man drew near, the half-nodding soldier of the people straightened and in a drowsy voice commanded him to halt. The other obeyed; looked around him again, noting the solitary aspect of the place at that early hour.

“Your pass!”

An obstinate light came into the man's eyes; if he did not advance, neither did he retreat, and the guard raised his weapon menacingly. Another moment and the stranger would have answered for his contempt of military authority, when quickly he lifted his hand to his breast, drawing forth a bit of paper. Grumbling, the sentinel allowed him to approach. But even as the former stared first with surprise and then with suspicion at the paper, striving to decipher it, the silence was broken by a loud hollow reverberation—the report of a gun from the heights of the city.

At the sound the guard involuntarily glanced over his shoulder, a lapse of alertness that was but momentary, yet sufficient for the stranger. Quick as a flash he sprang upon the sentinel; his arm straightened, and the guard fell limply to the earth, his gun clattering beside him. The man stooped, grasped the

bit of paper and ran through the gate. Turning into a narrow highway, he soon lost himself in a net-work of thoroughfares.

For some time he continued walking at a sharp pace, apparently with no more definite purpose than to escape pursuit, but at length his gait began to relax and finally he stopped short altogether. Seating himself on the edge of a mutilated monument—the crowning figure of which was Glory with its wings blown off—he opened a clenched hand and smoothed out the crumpled bit of paper:

“Am ill. Elinor helpless and in great danger. Can you come? Edwin Rossiter.”

“In great danger”! He had not hesitated; he had not thought of hesitating upon receiving it.

And now—if Mr. Rossiter only had not failed to send an address! Rising, Richard Strong moved on, up the height where once the temple of Mars is said to have stood. Near the summit he paused.

Below lay a comprehensive view of Paris, and keenly he searched that maze, noting where the tangle of streets huddled between the straight lines of the broader thoroughfares, and how, amid the maze, like a silver ribbon, shone the placid river. In fancy he traced his way toward it, and then, descending by a

different and more precipitous route, resolutely set his face toward the actual accomplishment.

As he proceeded, the city began to show signs of awakening life; an animation as feverish as unnatural. People seemed to spring mysteriously from the very pavements, and of one accord to wend their way to a neighboring church, as if there existed among them a strange unanimity of purpose—surely no devotional sentiment—drawing them to the sacred edifice. For a moment Richard Strong watched them, then, moved by a special object of his own, became part and parcel of that variegated and chaotic inflow.

The interior was filled with tobacco smoke and in the font was tobacco from which the elect were at liberty to help themselves. Glasses and wine bottles covered the altar and in the pulpit a woman was speaking, her topic, the “rights” of the sex; the right not to marry; the right to live with any man; the right to leave him at pleasure; the right to do anything!

Without comprehending, Richard Strong listened. He had thought that perhaps in that throng might be discerned an English or an American face, but the visages he encountered were nondescript, inhuman. All save one—

“What would Monsieur like to drink?”

A grisette had drawn near, smiling.

"They are going to burn up the city to-night, Monsieur, so we might as well be merry."

He gazed from them to her; then walked slowly to the door. Was this Paris? A few words beat persistently upon him. "Elinor—in danger—" And thinking of the time that had elapsed since the sending of the message and his arrival in the city, keener misgivings assailed him.

That afternoon he went to all the hotels centrally located. Many were closed; a few remained open, accommodating, however, but a scanty number of guests, stranded in Paris.

He drove where he could, urging the drivers to make haste; when he walked, it was with a quick, nervous step. Often the sentinels stopped him, and in spite of his tenacity, he was obliged to turn back. The coming of night found him still unsuccessfully pursuing his search and with but one more name on the list of hotels he had managed to procure.

At this place, near the Seine, a man with a pair of boots in his hands seemed to be the most important personage.

"We have only one guest," he explained in broken English; "and"—with a mournful gesture—"he went out and hasn't come back. These are his boots."

"The gentleman and lady I am looking for were in Paris about a fortnight ago. I have been to all the principal hotels."

"Perhaps they went to one of the small hotels for French people."

Richard Strong caught at the suggestion. He knew that Mr. Rossiter had lived in Paris before and during the empire, and that he understood thoroughly the language of the country.

"Where are these places?" he asked.

"Everywhere."

"Take me to them."

A curt refusal was the response. "Paris!—at night—away from the main streets—to go hunting about everywhere! I prefer it here—indoors."

Richard Strong laid his hand on the man's arm. "Look here," he said almost roughly. "You've got to take me. Name your own price—two hundred francs—five hundred—but you must go."

The man dropped a shoe; looked down thoughtfully.

"Whether I am successful, or not?"

"Yes."

"It is dangerous—but for five hundred francs—I'll go!" he said with sudden decision. "That is, alone—it will be safer. You can stay here—and I will return—as soon as I can."

"I tell you we've got to go together."

The man's face took on a sullen expression, and apparently Richard Strong saw that no further concession might be expected.

"Go alone then," he said shortly. "If you find them, I will double the amount."

Quickly the man put on his cap and handed the other a key. "Should you go out, lock the door."

Mr. Strong returned no answer; alone he began to survey his surroundings. A pair of candles, burning unevenly, faintly illumined the little office in which he stood, revealing its meager furnishings: a single chair; a shelf for candles; a key rack, and a small table upon which was the porter's scanty repast—a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine. For some time Richard Strong sat in the semi-darkness, waiting, thinking, but so many pictures crowded upon him that to ward them off he arose, pacing to and fro. An occasional report broke the stillness of the night; a strange smell was in the air, the odor of burning petroleum.

How long did this endure? Suddenly he became aware that the door leading to the street had opened softly and at first he thought it was the wind; then discerned an arm thrust through the opening; an arm that threw something within! Richard Strong

stepped forward and, as he did so, the intruder lighted a match, the glare of which revealed a wild, haggard face. It—she—too saw him; a shriek pierced the air and the light fell to the floor. At the same time a chorus of voices arose without:

“Les pétroleuses!”

Several shots were followed by a muffled cry, and Richard Strong, now standing in the doorway, gazed upon a motionless, huddled-up figure lying on the pavement; at the smoking weapons of the guard, already disappearing. Near the fleshless, outstretched hand lay a bottle, and regarding this receptacle in connection with the scene just witnessed, he had no difficulty divining the inspiring incendiary purpose. Left where it had fallen, the figure of the “petroleum woman,” clad in rags, was exposed to the wheels of every passing vehicle and he drew the body to the sidewalk; then turning from this task, as repellent as it had seemed imperative, he stood hesitating beside it.

He felt the need of action—movement. The thought of remaining longer in the little office was intolerable, and telling himself he would not go far, he walked down the street. The same question reiterated in his mind: If the porter failed, what then? The bright lights of a flaming entrance attracted his attention, and a great lithograph pasted on the wall caught his eye. The build-

ing was a theater; the announcement, a burlesque then being performed there.

How Jolly Life Is! was the title of the piece, and, in exemplification of the name, a woman with figure preposterous, Parisian, was exhibited dancing, a tricolor in one hand and over her shoulder a bayonet with a bunch of roses on its tip.

"Zoldene as the Communist Zouave!" read the announcement.

He drew his breath quickly. So she was here, too? And Elinor?—Dalton? The blood suddenly rushed to Richard Strong's head. A moment he stood; then wheeled about and entered the temple of pleasure.

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE ENCOUNTER

A seat on the aisle, not far from the back, was turned down for him, and as he sank into it a woman, primly attired, knelt at his feet; adjusted a footstool; then alert, expectant, straightened herself. But the customary response was not forthcoming. She raised her brows.

"The program, Monsieur!"

He took it and deliberately she held out her hand. When she drew it back the ironical look had vanished; her lips were voluble with thanks. At that moment, however, Richard Strong had no heed for her, or any single person. He was conscious only of an effect; the merging of the phantoms of the day—gross, ragged, gibbering in the holy light of stained glass windows—into a more glittering, yet not less seemingly fallacious, throng. But soon that general impression—a perception of over-vivid hues and Paphian, painted puppets—was succeeded by the more specific, special cognizance of a single figure.

She stood before the footlights singing. Her scanty costume frankly revealed the trim outlines of her figure; a hat, *à la République*, crowned her glossy curls, and upon her shoulder, emphasizing its powdered whiteness, a black velvet bow waved like a mammoth moth. In the white light of the calcium she glittered and gleamed, and while her voice was not that of a Malibran or a Pasta, her audacity and vivacity were well calculated to beguile an audience into evidences of approval.

She took a high note execrably, but at the conclusion of the tone, gave her head such a prima-donna-like toss and regarded her listeners with such a ravishing smile, even the critical auditor forgot the singer in contemplation of the siren.

“Bravo, Zoldene!”

Whereupon she showed her white teeth and a dimple and fluttered to the footlights. Again the faulty tones; once more the persuasive battery of smiles; the varying postures designed to display to advantage the white shoulders and rounded arms.

“Why are you so sober, Monsieur?”

A girl, wearing a Legion of Honor sash, bent forward, significantly regarding the vacant place next to Richard Strong.

“Aren’t you going to ask me to sit down?”

He made no motion to remove his hat from the seat.

"Poof!" she said, drawing back with a gesture of disappointment. "You are not very polite."

As through a mist—or was it the smoke that waved and wavered around them?—the figure on the stage approached and receded. Still the shrill treble overrode the clatter and din of the soldiers of fortune, blasé dandies and their lorettes. A sprightly infectious rhythm, it was, however, in turn interrupted, dominated by a more stentorian voice:

"Paris is burning!"

As a passing cloud transforms the surface aspect of the sunlit water, so a nameless fear changed and darkened the appearance of that sea of smiling faces. Upon the stage the words of the song died on Zoldene's lips; those in the background began to move about in disorder.

"Go on! Go on!"

The leader of the musicians stamped his feet; violently waved his baton. In quavering tones Zoldene began once more; gaining confidence as she proceeded, her manner again became jaunty, reckless.

"Paris is burning!"

The conductor by this time, however, had the performers well in control, beating time with his fists, with furious sweeps of his long arms.

"Presto!—More life! more fire!"

"The Tuileries is in flames!—the Louvre!—the Rue Royale—"

Above a carnival of hues—fluttering dolls with sashes of all colors, and bows of enormous proportions fastened upon, or perched on their dresses—Richard Strong suddenly discerned an unresponsive figure which arrested his attention to the exclusion of all else.

He was seated in a box—a young man; his face marked with premature lines; his eyes, cold; his expression, bored. With a half-contemptuous, half-ironical look his gaze slowly swept the multitude; then stopped. The languor faded from his expression and with a start he leaned forward, staring at Richard Strong.

"The theater is on fire!—the theater!—"

A puff of smoke had curled outward from behind and arose like a thin veil. It was followed by a denser cloud and on the instant the romping dolls were stricken motionless like automatons that had run down. Merriment gave way to terror; laughter, to shrieks. Involuntarily Richard Strong had stepped toward Dalton, when, caught in the outward rush of the swaying throng, he was carried on as by a torrent. Powerless to resist, held in that mighty whirl, his strength was as nothing to the aggregate force brought to bear upon him. In the narrow doorway the jam became greater; a moment he realized the weight about him was crushing him

into unconsciousness; then suddenly he was shot forth against a wall.

Above, the heavens were red; against the glowing background flashes of light played ominously. Scarcely conscious of what he was doing, he staggered on, animated by a single purpose. The hotel—he would return there—perhaps the porter had come back—perhaps he had learned something!

As Richard Strong raised his head, the Seine, now a river of molten fire, burst upon his gaze. Gleaming with the radiance from a burning palace, it swept on, lapping the stone confines of its course with phosphorescent rays. Soon they grew darker, as from the sullen caldron, where once monarchs had played at “divine rights,” outpoured an increasing volume of smoke which now blotted from the sky the vivid hues. Only a sickly glow shot at intervals through the fumid mantle, making the shadows appear deeper, the streets more gloomy, and the people, tristful specters that walked in darkness. But that they were not mere melancholy shadows, creatures passionless from the realms of night, was quickly made manifest to the man near the river.

“Les pétroleuses!”

The dimness of the night became alive with human figures; a final explosion from the palace again lighted

up the scene and in that brief interval Richard Strong saw the face and figure of a girl, standing on the sidewalk, around her a number of people. A moment amazement, incredulity, held him motionless, incapable of action. Still the light played on her features.

“Kill her!”

“The Seine!—throw her into the Seine!”

CHAPTER VI

THE BREAKING OF THE DAY

Blinded by the glare, the girl had started back, only to feel her wrist seized in a grip like iron. In vain she endeavored to resist, struggling as best she might, but still the dark forms, now dimly discerned, crowded around her. A feeling that it was the end was succeeded by a vague, dumb wonder. Some one had leaped into the throng and was striking among them; an instant she was lost in a whirl, and then the grasp upon her wrist was released.

“Run! Run!”

Vainly she strove to obey; her feet were as lead, when a compelling arm thrust her forward and again she found herself capable of motion. Bewildered, she could not realize what had happened; what it all meant. Some people had attacked her; some one had made it possible for her to escape. Or was it possible?

“Les pétroleuses!”

Now she began to understand—the “petroleum women!”—they thought she was one of them. The bottle

for medicine that she had been carrying had condemned her.

Her feet began to lag, when from behind a hand touched her shoulder; she strove to shake it off; the fingers tightened and the world went round.

“Elinor!”

Some one caught her; raised her. Through the half-apathy of her thoughts a familiar voice insinuated itself.

“Elinor!”

Her eyes opened; bewilderment, joy crowded her brain.

“Richard!”

She felt his arm thrown about her; herself dragged on. The darkness seemed to press upon her and she found herself imagining it was all but a waking dream.

Suddenly he stopped.

“The hotel—if I could but find it—”

Unfortunately the buildings were of a pattern, presenting a wearisome uniformity of style, and in vain he glanced on either side, striving to single out that refuge that he knew to be so near. Even as he searched, closer came the pattering of feet.

A moment they regarded each other; swiftly glance met glance. Like a flash of light, her eyes, bright,

burning, responded to the questioning, devouring eagerness of his.

"Leave me," she said. "Why should you, too—"

Hastily he thrust her behind him. Life had grown strangely sweet; the irony of fortune—that he had found her too late—awoke a fierce revolt in his breast. With lowering brow he stood awaiting their assailants when a cry escaped Elinor and he turned. In pressing back she had pushed against a door which had swung open behind her. Quickly entering, he drew her after him; the door closed; his hand sought, found, a bolt which he shot. Almost simultaneously blows resounded on the woodwork from without, but the door, like many another, had been strengthened during the siege.

"Are we safe now?"

His answer was drowned by a crash that made the door tremble; again, and it gave way. Her hand touched his arm and he caught her to him.

"Elinor!—love!—"

At that moment a strange sound arose from the street, at first a weird monotone, then a screech which sent the people fleeing from the entrance. An instant's silence, and the iron messenger from the heights of Montmartre performed its wonted functions. No respecter of persons, it struck down alike Communard or

stranger, man or woman, and thereafter, for some time no living being was seen stirring near that spot.

When consciousness at length slowly returned to Richard Strong, he continued to lie without motion, staring straight upward. A band of steel seemed pressing around his head; his thoughts were confused. Into the throbbing of his brain crept a vague recollection—a river, now silver, then red. Red!—white!—the colors danced before him. Then the warm hue lingered and with it came the rest of the picture.

“Elinor!” he said, and sat up.

Only the echoes answered. Again he spoke; strove to listen; then began to grope around until he touched something soft—a dress! Bending, he placed an unsteady hand on her breast. At first he was cognizant only of the throbbing in his brain, a steady pulsation like that of the piston of a boat; then beneath his fingers he felt a faint motion. Drawing her to him, he pillowed her head upon his breast.

Some time passed. Occasionally the silence without was broken by the rushing of feet, the flourish of trumpets. These sounds—an aching sense of touch from the pressure of her body, which was both pain and pleasure—a growing perception of sight, mingled in the stupor of his brain. Certain rays of light that had en-

tered their prison grew brighter and dimly he began to discern the surrounding objects: A wall pierced by a window beyond his reach; to the left a few steps leading upward to a door.

Rising, he placed his coat beneath her head and clinging to the wall, made his way to the steps. Mounting with an effort, he opened a door, entered. A candle with matches, which he found on the table, he managed to light, and by its sputtering rays made out a small apartment; a bottle on a table; a loaf of bread. Over a couch was the cord that opened the front door and near the narrow bed, a man's pair of boots—

Richard Strong stared at the boots and at the bottle, then regarded an array of candles on a shelf; half-candles, quarter-candles, three-quarter candles. The place was familiar; he had stood in that room before—last night! The door that had opened to admit them—when he had left the hotel he had forgotten to lock it.

Again he descended the steps and lifting the unconscious girl in his arms, carried her to the couch, when dizziness overcame him and he fell into a chair. Less distinct became her face; he told himself he would not yield, and, grasping the table, forced himself to rise. As he did so, a door to the left, opening into a garden or inner court, was abruptly thrown back and a figure stood in the entrance.

"Monsieur, I found the man, but his daughter—"

The words ceased on his lips and wonderingly he gazed on the other.

"I have found her myself," said Richard Strong.

CHAPTER VII

A MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE

"Will you be good enough to tell me what place this is?"

The speaker, lying in a high bed, raised himself on his elbow. Apparently the apartment was strange to his eyes, for a puzzled look crossed his face and his glance wandered perplexedly to a person seated in a gilt chair near the window. The burly back of him addressed turned; the man arose, and, approaching the bed, regarded his questioner with a good-natured smile.

"The Hotel République."

"How long have I been here?"

"About twenty-four hours."

Richard Strong studied the speaker.

"Pardon me, if I ask—"

"Who I am? A London press correspondent. Went through the siege. Know Paris in feast and famine. Can tell you that kittens taste like red squirrels—that Angoras are preferable to stray tabbies, and that rats

have the flavor of meadow-larks. This was my hotel—left it and was unavoidably detained. When I got back, found part of it gone. Also found you here—”

The other stirred uneasily.

“The lady—who was here with me?”

“Was not injured. The porter said she drove off to her own hotel that same morning, and if she has followed the example of other Americans she has left the city by this time. But I must be going now; will drop in again later.”

Richard Strong stared at the door through which the speaker vanished and then looked out of the window. Beyond the tiny red flowers of a vine a housetop waved oddly to and fro. He strove to sit up, whereupon the flowers began to dance wildly, like elfish things, and again he fell back. His eyes closed, and housetop and flowers alike faded from his mind.

He was vaguely conscious of half-waking several times that day, of speaking with a doctor; of relapsing toward nightfall into a deeper sleep. When he again looked around him his vision was clearer; the dizziness had left him, and, reaching from the bed, he pulled a cord hanging to the wall. The passing minutes brought no response; impatiently he waited, then rising slowly, began to dress. On a little table near the bed were rolls, cold fowl, and a small bottle of wine. When he

had eaten he was able to make his way along the hall and descend the stairway.

Deserted was the little office, but in the corridor the porter stood directing several workmen engaged in removing the brick and mortar. The shattered front wall had been propped up with heavy upright timbers and the task of repairing the havoc was proceeding apace.

At the unexpected sight of his guest the man gave an exclamation of surprise.

"We are house-cleaning, as you see," he said, recovering himself, "preparing for the coming of monsieur, the proprietor, who returns from the country now that it is all over."

"What is over?"

"The Commune. Which reminds me of my errand for Monsieur: The old gentleman and his daughter—they are at Madame Fracard's, a little hotel of the first Empire, seldom frequented by foreigners—once noted for its cuisine."

Richard Strong looked down. "The lady you found here with me—had she quite recovered when she left?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Has any one called, or sent word?"

The man fumbled in his blouse; drew forth an envelope. "I am reminded of this message—"

Hastily the other glanced at it. The handwriting was strange, foreign.

"How do I get to the street?" he said absently.

"If Monsieur does not mind the back way—"

Upon the avenues and boulevards Mr. Strong found—or would have observed, had he been in an observant mood—evidences of activity and zeal promising a speedy rehabilitation of the city. Those who had been busily engaged in tearing up pavements only a short time before, were now no less zealously occupied in putting them down. But no consideration of the outward aspect of the city or the transformation that had already come to pass, now occupied Richard Strong as he walked on. The letter the porter had given him engrossed his attention.

"If M. Richard Strong will call at the hospital, some one he knows who is dying would like to see him."

Written with pencil in a labored hand on the paper of one of the general hospitals, the message was dated the day before and signed by one of the Sisters.

The missive wavered in his hand—"some one he knew?"—but the porter had said—

Calling a passing carriage, he showed the address to the driver and entered the vehicle.

At the hospital he exhibited the letter to a man in

charge in the little office at the door. This official looked at the message; rang a bell, and shortly afterward Richard Strong was following a black-robed Sister down the corridor. They traversed several hallways; ascended many stairs, but finally the nurse stopped, and, ushering him into an upper ward, indicated a cot.

At the visitor's entrance the patient, who had been lying with closed eyes, turned his head, and, with a start Richard Strong regarded, then recognized him. And yet could it be—this figure, the head so bound about with bandages as to make the features almost indistinguishable? Now the eyes opened; stared around. Pain, fear, as from the remembrance or effect of some never-to-be-forgotten scene, or catastrophe, shone in that glance.

"Mr. Strong," he whispered, and closed his eyes once more.

Quietly the Sister brought forward a chair, placed it at the bedside and Richard Strong seated himself.

"You wanted to see me?"

The lids wavered.

"Yes," murmured Dalton and paused. "It was good of you—to come." In Charlie's blue eyes a certain wistfulness replaced the look of pain.

"How," asked Richard Strong, "did you find me?"

"Yesterday—Galignani published—list of strangers. The doctors gave me—but a day or two." His gaze looked beyond the man at the bedside. "I'll not be sorry—when it's over."

He uttered these words in starts; his respiration short; his breathing loud. For some moments no other sound broke the stillness of the room; then his glance fixed itself again on Mr. Strong.

"It was my fault—not hers! She was but a girl—seeking diversion—unhappy. That day you saw us—in the street—I waited for her—to learn—she had never cared for me—"

The voice became weaker; ceased; then he lay still. Richard Strong, too, did not stir; dark shadows fell around him; from either side came a sigh, or a moan, the travail of some spirit drawing nearer the inevitable goal. Through an open doorway he could see a priest placing a vessel of oil on a little table before a crucifix near a bed and dully he watched him.

"Corpus Domini—"

Life and its passions; death and its mystery vibrated in the sad, majestic cadence of those tones.

"A poor woman—Zoldene—who was injured, too, in the burning theater," whispered the nurse. "She has confessed and is receiving extreme unction."

As she spoke she crossed the hall to the door; closed it. At the same time Dalton stirred uneasily.

"What is that?"

Pityingly the Sister laid a soothing hand on his. With his fingers he picked at the coverlet, while his mind, as if groping in that gloom that was falling around him, began to wander:

"Gold, one thirty-six!—a quarter!—how's the market?—sell!—buy!—"

"Hush!"

Again the nurse endeavored to quiet him, but he did not heed; apparently his thoughts were only in the past, caught up in the maelstrom of that late September.

"Gold!—it's coming down!—you can't hold it!—we're swamped!—it's all been a foolish dream!—money!—love!—"

He endeavored to rise, but fell back with a moan.

"I tell you I can never get up, Tom; never!"

The door of the room across the hall opened; with tinkling bell the priest came out, moved on, in his hand a silver chalice. Did Charlie see him; feel the breath of that black gown? Over his face came a look of sudden relief.

"The bell!" he said. "The bell! One—two—three—Thank God, the day is done!"

CHAPTER VIII

RICHARD STRONG LEAVES PARIS

Slowly Richard Strong began to retrace his way, conscious now of weakness, or weariness, or both. The front entrance of the hotel, which he presently reached, he found clear of rubbish, and, at the door, the rotund face of no less a person than the proprietor, beaming with the good humor of a returned exile.

"Monsieur wishes a room?" he said, as Richard Strong walked in. "Monsieur already has a room? Then I welcome him, or rather he welcomes me."

"Has any one been here to see me?"

"No one."

Entering a little smoking-room, adjoining the office, Richard Strong sank into a chair; mechanically began to look over the English and American papers on the table in the center of the room. Through force of habit he glanced at the quotations of the American market, but his mind soon wandered from fractions and figures, and leaning back, he endeavored to formulate his plans.

Should he see her before he went? What inference could be drawn save that she had no wish to meet him again? The Commune was over; she was out of danger; his errand was ended.

"Ended!" He repeated the word to himself. "Yes, ended!"—and touched a bell.

The proprietor answered it himself.

"When does the next steamer sail from Havre?"

The man went to a rack and took therefrom several folders.

"One boat leaves to-morrow; another next week, Tuesday. Or"—consulting a second list—"if Monsieur cares to sail from Plymouth—"

"To-morrow? Yes; I might go to-morrow."

"If Monsieur desires, I will book his passage."

"No. Give me the address. If I decide to go, I will attend to it myself."

"As Monsieur pleases!" And with a little shrug the man left.

Restlessly the other strode to and fro, knowing he was weak now; that he hung back from that which circumstances told him he should do. "It may be she has been ill." He began to find reasons, excuses for his failure to receive word or message from her. Surmise bred surmise; expanded into apprehension; the hotel

had become intolerable, and, taking up his hat, he left the room.

"How shall I reach Madame Fracard's?"

The porter wrote an address on a card.

"Monsieur turns three streets to the left, two to the right and then straight on."

The shades of twilight were falling as Richard Strong once more left the hotel, but by the time he had reached the vicinity of Madame Fracard's, night had fairly enveloped the city. From the opposite side he studied the building and was about to cross, when the curtain of one of the lower windows was drawn aside, and plainly he saw her whom he sought; looking out—with the shimmer of light in her hair—the slenderness of her figure outlined against the white glow of the lamp.

From afar he regarded her, discerning very distinctly, until a swift movement of a white hand and the drapery was drawn, shutting him out from sight of her.

For some moments he continued to gaze at the window. She was not ill; had not been ill. Yet he had lain there at the hotel—two days—alone—

Slowly he began to walk away; then stopped. The memory of the light in her eyes that night they had faced death together, seized him. He saw her again, as he had seen her then, and retraced his steps.

From a neighboring café came the sound of voices,

and, obeying the desire to linger, he moved toward one of the little iron-legged tables and seated himself. Between her window and him flowed a ceaseless traffic; at the curb a street-singer twanged a guitar; passing and repassing many venders proffered their wares with brisk interchange of pleasantry.

A waiter addressed to him some inquiry to which he nodded without hearing, whereupon the man vanished only to reappear with a foaming glass. As Richard Strong sat there, the figure of a woman leaving the Fracard house and turning quickly into the street, caused him to half-start from his chair. Now the lights from the window of a pastry-shop shone upon her—a person short, heavy, of middle age—and again he sank back.

Darkly the walls of the house across the way continued to answer his gaze; from one or two windows gleamed a faint suggestion of a light somewhere within; once a spark flashed back and forth and disappeared like a will-o'-the-wisp. Over Richard Strong gradually crept a strange impression; a feeling of dejection; despondency.

Two chess players at an adjoining table plied their game and abstractedly he watched the moves, noting how the conflict often hung in the balance.

To cross over, or to return to his hotel? He weighed the propositions.

Now the white men on the chess-board pressed the black, but in the contest honors were even. "If white wins," said Richard Strong to himself, "I'll go to Madame Fracard's." He did not know whether he really meant it, but with new interest, watched the tide of battle. On, on, advanced the white pieces! The loyal subjects rallied to their king. "He is lost," thought the observer, when a sudden flank movement, a swift pressing forward of knight, bishop and queen, and the white king was mated.

Richard Strong arose, and, without stopping for the change from the silver piece he handed the waiter, walked quickly away. Later that night he left Paris.

CHAPTER IX

AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS

The months in America that followed were to Mr. Strong, according to his fellow-men and neighbors, both fruitful and propitious. Old ventures expanded; new ones prospered. A self-contained man, he was no less taciturn than formerly; of a solitary disposition, he confined himself to a well-settled routine: His office—his club—his house—these were the places he frequented.

The last-named specific resort, the home bought just before his marriage, had become an unending topic of conversation to the neighbors. It was so aggressively large; so unreasonably silent; so unreservedly isolated and retiring, even in that square where peace and quiet reigned! Like its master, it seemed to stand uncompromisingly apart; and gossip, albeit somewhat subdued in that chosen corner of the busy city, was, nevertheless, rife with conjecture and reasons.

But unconscious of the interest he excited in the breasts of others, Richard Strong continued to go his

own way. Summer and autumn found him daily at his desk during, and after, Wall Street hours, and winter brought no change in the stress of his exertions. So the seasons passed; Christmas came and went, and the year grew old and waned. The new year, too, promised but a repetition of the labors of the old, for on that day commonly regarded as a period for rest and mutual felicitations Tim Taplin, repairing to the office, found his employer already there and at his desk.

The chief clerk somewhat ruefully greeted Mr. Strong with the compliments of the day. "Excuse me, sir," he then ventured, "but you're not going to work to-day?"

The other did not answer, and Mr. Taplin, exercising a privilege that came from long service, went on: "If you don't mind my saying it, you don't know how much good it does one to take a day off occasionally."

"Then why are *you* here?" said Mr. Strong.

"Well, sir—" apologetically—"to tell you the truth, I rather suspected you might come down and thought if you did you would need some one—"

But his employer had already turned to his desk; indeed, was absorbed in a diagram before him, the drawings of one of those simple inventions which, like the air-brake, or the car-coupler, made possible the growth and spread of great railroad systems. Tim noticed, however, that Mr. Strong did not apply himself to the

study of the device with that interest its merits seemed to warrant, and, that in dictating his letters, he paused several times to correct himself. Finally he pushed back his chair.

"The Street is too quiet for good work, Tim! We might as well stop."

After the clerk had taken his departure, Richard Strong also arose. Perhaps truly the silence was oppressive and he missed the activity with which he was usually surrounded. At any rate, the environment became distasteful to him; his imagination refused to respond to the appeal of patents, labor-saving devices or even the consideration of sundry prospective corporations.

Work! work! work! What did it all profit a man? A few more railroads; a few more mines—what did they matter to him? The whole scheme of strife in that moment of depression seemed only a child's game. Money!—power!—men but fettered themselves to golden thrones; then vainly clanked their chains.

Impatiently he checked this train of fancy, and, walking to the window, looked out. A white fog overhung the city; embraced the little isle with its obscuring mantle. At intervals he could hear the sound of fog-horns afar, and—so still was the frosty air—almost fancied he could detect the beating and puffing of boats.

"It will be difficult for steamers to enter the harbor to-day," he thought, as he turned to the grate and stirred the coals.

In fancy spectral ships continued to pass and repass. He must have fallen into a half-doze when a shuffling of feet in the passage aroused him; the door was pushed open and a thin, small face looked in.

"Paper, sir? New Year's address. I saw you in the window."

Mr. Strong surveyed the mite; took the paper and handed him a coin. The lad shuffled out; the footsteps ceased.

The man at the fire laid aside the colored souvenir; spread the newspaper on his knee, when the steamship arrivals caught his glance.

"Among the passengers—on the Madrid—Mrs. Edwin Rossiter—Mrs. Elinor Rossiter Strong—"

He ceased to read. During the seven months intervening since he had left Paris, he had heard from her but once; a letter of only a few lines, sad and reserved, announcing the sudden but peaceful death of her father. He recalled its contents now; his own answer; that subsequent long period of silence. Only indirectly had he ever learned of her; he had not even known she was coming home. Again he glanced at the newspaper; looked at his watch; then rising, drew on his coat and gloves and left the building.

Upon the street the air was cold, penetrating; the fog so thick the familiar church-steeple lost itself somewhere behind the milky cloud. Now no sound broke the stillness except the monotonous crunching of his boots in the snow, but as he made his way up-town a jingle of sleigh-bells grew ever nearer and louder. All the beaux and dandies were out, "making calls" with joyous and democratic freedom, the countenances of some of them as they swung into view bearing unmistakably the rubicund signs of the hour. Even at his club—usually a staid and quiet place—Richard Strong found evidences of the Epicurean aspect of the day in a great punch bowl, garlanded with flowers, and a generous repast of tempting variety, spread upon the long tables in place of the erstwhile sober literature.

But he did not long remain there.

"Going so soon?" called out some one.

"Of course!" said another. "Didn't his wife come home yesterday?"

Once more on the street, however, he hesitated. A long, purposeless day stared him in the face. How should he spend it? His horses? Yes; he might take them out. But where? Since that night of the Eclipse dance, the road, his favorite drive, had lost its attractions. He had told himself this was merely an unreasonable prejudice—a road was only a road, to be

driven on! But in spite of all reasoning, he continued to experience a distinct disinclination for the popular thoroughfare.

He felt it to-day, stronger than ever. What then? A sense of impatience stirred him as he turned into the square and approached his home; his well-ordered mind revolted against vacillation and uncertainty. Nor was the appearance of his house calculated to allay that feeling. On every hand lights shone from the parlors of other dwellings; one mansion alone was dark, forbidding. With shutters closed in many windows, it appeared almost tenantless.

Once Richard Strong had sat in the little park before it and wondered how it would look when she would be mistress there; when her presence would lend life and light to the great place. The old memory intruded itself. Then the flowers had bloomed and the birds had sung around him, and the barren stone walls had seemed an Aladdin palace of beauty in the perspective. But flowers and birds had gone, and the solid outlines were shorn of all pretense of architectural preëminence.

"I'll sell the place," he thought, as he ushered himself into the hall.

Reflectively he looked before him when a peculiar rustling sound caused him to turn.

"Who is it?" he said.

Only the silence answered.

"I am imaginative to-day," he thought, when the sound was repeated—in the library.

"Who is there?" he asked again and quickly stepped forward; but stopped.

Yes; there was some one!—a girl!—a girl in black! For the moment he could not believe his senses, but stared at her incredulously. She seemed as unreal as a vision, and yet her eyes were bright with life; her breast rose and fell quickly.

"Elinor!"

Was it his sudden exclamation?—the joy in his voice? She stretched out her hands.

"Oh," she said, "I had to come. I could not stand it any longer."

His heart leaped and the world went round, as swiftly he reached out; grasped her hands.

"You had to come?"

Was it only his eyes that spoke?

"I could not help it," she went on hurriedly and the hands in his trembled. "There seemed only one way—to see you. Ever since that night in Paris I have felt I must see you. No matter what you might think! No matter how you might receive me!"

His fingers tightened; he drew her nearer.

"Why did you want to see me?"

“Why—”

Her color came and went.

“Why?” She felt the strength, the power of his grasp.

“Why—because—”

Some force swayed her toward him. She raised her head with an effort, but her eyes met his proudly.

“Because I love you!”

His hands released her—but for an instant!—then his arms enfolded her, crushed her to his breast and in the mingled pain and pleasure of that embrace his lips met hers.

“But you left Paris without seeing me again?”

He had gone to the window to throw back the blinds; now at her question, he turned.

“Had you sent word—”

She looked at him in surprise. “But I did!—the next day—by the woman—”

He went to her. “I never received it.”

“Never received the letter I wrote you—that my father was very ill, unconscious—that I had gone to him—but would return—”

Abruptly she broke off; a spark flashed up in her eyes; her hand tightened in his.

“That woman—she deceived me then—she feared to

go out—that night I met you I had gone for medicine because she would not go and there was no one else to send.”

“Do not think of it now,” he urged.

“But my letter? She told me that she left it for you—that you were recovering—later I went myself—you were gone. My father”—her voice faltered—“died on the day you went away.”

Gently he stroked her hair.

“That morning I left you—I was distracted, beside myself—fearing for my father—they promised to care for you—” She paused. “It was so strange, my meeting you,” she continued irrelevantly. “I have often wondered how you happened to be in Paris.”

“Because you were there. Your father sent me a cablegram that he was ill—you were in danger—”

She looked at him with shining eyes.

“You did not know?” he asked.

She shook her head, not trusting herself to speak.

“See!” he said. “The sun is coming out. It is breaking through the mist.”

As she followed his gaze, already the light gleamed on branch and bough; it entered the window; bathed them both. He watched her hair grow golden and its radiance held him as by a spell. For some time neither spoke.

Without, the sleigh-bells rang merrily, and the sound of laughter and the cracking of whips reached them.

"The New Year!"

"Our New Year!" she added softly.

Through the window lay the world, snow-white. The prismatic hues of the reflection were dancing in her eyes.

"How long," he said, "have you cared for me?"

"Always!" she answered confidently.

He made an incredulous gesture.

"Only—I didn't always know it."

"And when—did you know?"

"After I told you—I didn't!"

His eyes questioned her.

"At that moment I was resentful, capricious—perhaps a little hurt, too—that you could turn from me—on our wedding trip—to go back—for business. It seemed somehow, as if I only came *second* with you—"

"Second!" he cried.

"And then, if you had only treated me differently after I told you—what I didn't mean! But you looked at me as if I were only a—Proposition."

"A what?"

"A Proposition!" she reiterated. "And that made me the more perverse." She was silent a moment. "Of course you couldn't understand a person who said—what

she didn't mean, and you—you misjudged me. Oh, I deserved it," she added quickly, "I knew then I did!"

He put out his arm, but she held him from her.

"It seemed, though, after that, as if things could never be made right and I was so unhappy but too proud to say so. If you had only been at your office on Black Friday, when I went there!"

He started. "You were there, Elinor?"

"Yes, and I thought then you were going to lose—everything—and I shouldn't have been then too proud to tell you—" She sighed. "But you didn't, and the next day everything was wrong again. I was horrid, and you—" she glanced up at him—"you were, too!"

He laughed but did not controvert the statement.

"After all it was business, miserable old business that separated us." She looked thoughtfully at him a moment. "I'm afraid, Richard, you married a very foolish, impractical girl, who dreamed, perhaps, of some romantic, equally impractical, Prince Charming."

Mr. Strong threw back his head. "Prince Charming? I am afraid I do not fit the rôle."

"No," she said, nodding her assent.

He looked down. Her lips curved; beneath her lashes was a gleam like the sparkle of frost-crystals.

"You are not my prince, perhaps! I may never meet my prince, but I have found—"

He drew her closer; raised her face to his.

“—My king!” she whispered.

Of the small company who “dropped in” that evening, no one beamed upon Mr. Strong more complacently than Mrs. Rossiter, while the glances she bestowed upon her daughter were of the tenderest variety. The good lady was at a loss to know how *it* happened—but it *had* happened, there was no doubt about that—and Mrs. Rossiter might chafe a little with natural, or maternal, curiosity, but for the present the fact, the bare fact, must be sufficient unto itself.

“You came home just in time,” whispered Posie to Elinor.

“What for?”

“Guess?”

Which was not difficult to do. Between Miss Stanton and Tom Marks, who had accompanied her, had passed many knowing glances, fraught with the weight of a mighty mutual Understanding. Conscious of this happy Secret—which was no secret—Mr. Marks lost his shyness. The man thus trusted by Miss Posie was surely a person of consequence, and Tom found a new place for himself in his own estimation. He was no longer the Shadow, but the Substance; the favored of the fair; the idol of two roguish blue eyes.

Even Doctor Clement's manner toward Richard Strong was cordial and magnanimous. Perhaps the day had something to do with it, or the cheering goblet of those fair Circes who had presided in the "best" houses that day.

"I didn't mind the money so much," he laughed, "but to have it given to Mr. Beecher's church—"

Mr. Strong glanced at Elinor. Her eyes met his. "Your church, Doctor Clement, shall have a double amount for the poor. That is," he added, smiling, "if there are any."

The rector coughed. "The poor, sir," he answered, "we have always with us."

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